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BY

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New York: 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago: 17 N. Wabash Ave.
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TO
THE CONGREGATION OF
ST. GEORGE'S UNITED FREE CHURCH
EDINBURGH
IN HAPPY MEMORY OF
TEN YEARS MINISTRY

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I

LISTENING TO GOD

I will incline mine ear to a parable.—PSALM xlix. 4.

IN this Psalm the subject is the great and dark problem of divine providence, the old problem that troubled so many Old Testament saints, why the wicked sometimes succeed and the righteous suffer. The Psalmist tells us in his introduction that he will open the dark saying, the riddle, on the harp. By his poetic and spiritual intuition he pierces through the surface of things to declare the utter vanity of life without God, no matter what appearance of success there may be. He tells us frankly that it is not by argument he arrives at this certitude, but by inspiration. He is stating a fact that must be, in spite of all seeming facts that contradict it. He has learned this from his own inner experience. His mouth is going to speak of wisdom; but with the beautiful figure of our text he suggests the only true attitude for one who is dealing with the great problem of human life. He does not say that he will open his

mouth to speak a parable, but that he will incline his ear to a parable; as if he bends to hear and simply repeats what he thus learns. The method is intuition, not induction. He the Teacher is giving out what he has learned. "I will incline mine ear," as a man who listens to truth from above that he may give it out to others. He asks for attention because he himself has attended. He can be God's interpreter to others because he himself has listened to God. Through insight into the true foundation of life, he assumes the right to proclaim his message to all. He has listened to the wisdom that is from above, and so has truth to declare. This is the attitude of a true Teacher, that he is a Learner, opens his ear morning by morning to receive the right impressions; as Isaiah says, "He wakeneth mine ear morning by morning to hear as a learner." He who is sent to teach gets not the tongue of a master but the tongue of a disciple. The secret of the golden tongue is the open ear.

A great preacher used to say that in preaching the thing of least importance was the sermon. I suppose what he meant was that it is not what he says but *himself* that counts most. Not the fine expressions and the logical marshalling of the thoughts, but the spiritual atmosphere he creates,

the indefinable impression of earnestness and seriousness and conviction—this is the great instrument of persuasion. You have been awed and influenced by speech, not one word of which you can remember. It was not important that you should remember anything, but it was of infinite importance that you should be impressed by the reality of the particular truth, and most of all assured of the reality of the spiritual world. In all prophetic speech there is a subtle spirit which communicates itself to disciples, and which the teacher himself will lose if he forgets his true attitude. Perhaps this explains some of the ultimate failures in the ministry and in all teachers, failures of men who at one time had power and influence and moved others. The teacher must ever be a learner, simple and humble and sincere. It is not what we say but the spirit of our saying it. And this is true in the final judgment not only of speech but of all life. It is not what you do but the spirit of your doing it—the spiritual qualities that lie behind and colour every word and action.

Real growth is far more of a passive thing than we usually imagine, the reception of great influences, opening ourselves humbly to the forces that will mould us. The Psalmist when he asks people to give ear to him says as his qualification for speaking,

"I will incline mine ear." He must be attuned in spirit before he can open his dark saying on the harp to any purpose and teach others by his song. This passive attitude is the preparation for all true activity and the condition of all true growth. We become by attending, by inclining ear and heart, by listening, by being open to great formative influences. Wordsworth tells how the inspiration of Nature enters a maiden's heart and leaves its sweet mark on every feature.

> She shall lean her ear
> In many a secret place,
> Where rivulets dance their wayward round
> And beauty born of murmuring sound
> Shall pass into her face.

In the higher reaches of all truth a moment of insight is of more worth than a year of laborious learning. The two are not contradictory; indeed are usually found together, provided the labour is accompanied by a sincere mind and a humble heart. Certainly in religion no door is opened except to those who bend, who wait, who incline their ear.

That is why the child is the type of the Kingdom of Heaven, the mind that is open to the daily lesson, that morning by morning receives its portion, that

sweetly accepts the teaching of the Master, the life that waits on God patiently and appropriates each lesson humbly, ever susceptible to divine influence, ever responsive to the touch of God, ever obedient to the voice of God—of such, not of the proud, the arrogant, the self-assertive, but of such simple, inquiring, humble souls, is the Kingdom. We think sorrowfully of the contrast between this and our common attitude, the pitiful conceit that mars so much of our best work, the self-willed pride that disfigures our lives, the poor ambitions of pre-eminence, the brazen-throated assertion of our superior claims, the loud calling of intellectual wares in the market, the advertisement of capacity to instruct. The secret of wisdom and power and knowledge is humility. The secret of influence is simplicity. We learn to speak the high language of the soul as a child learns. We must be receptive and listen, and repeat what we hear. "I will incline mine ear to a parable," catch the story whose faint accents can only be heard in the silence, and then echo it to others, if perchance they too may incline their ear and listen. "I will hear what God the Lord will speak," says another Psalmist. To desire to hear, to be willing to listen, to incline the ear, is the first step to the great experience.

There is a moment which came to the prophets and to men called to exceptional work, a moment when the world is dissolved, when earth has faded and heaven has opened and reveals the eternal, a moment when in all the universe there seems nothing but God and the human soul. That moment altered the perspective of everything afterwards; they read everything in the light of that moment, and when in the future they were brought up against seemingly impassable difficulties and things that seemed irreconcilable with their faith, they simply fell back on God; for they knew that, whatever else might be false, that great experience must be true. We each in our degree can have something of the same assurance, the same certitude; and the method of acquiring it is to incline the ear and the heart.

It is the old story, you say, a plea for faith? Yes, a plea for faith. But be sure you know what faith is before you dismiss it contemptuously. Faith is not shutting the eyes to believe something which is not true. It is opening them, opening eye and ear and heart and the whole nature, and submitting them to that for which they were made. It is to have the ear of a learner, the heart of a child, to listen to the Father's voice. Faith is not the acceptance of propositions, an intellectual apprehension of

truths. It is an attitude of soul, listening to catch the faint echoes of the eternal song, an attitude of patient waiting and of eager desire to know God's will and way. It is the temper of the disciple who says by his expectant attitude, "I will incline mine ear."

The highest truths are not reached by analysis. The deepest appeal is not made to logic but to imagination, not to intellect but to heart. This is true not only in religion, but also in everything. To know and love nature is a simpler and higher thing than to know the geology of the rocks and the chemistry of the trees. To know and love flowers is a simpler and higher thing than to understand the botany of flowers. And to know and love Christ is a simpler and higher thing than to understand Christology, the theology of His person and work. Science can dissect and dissolve and analyse, and get at many a hidden secret by the way; but *the* secret has vanished. The life and meaning and vital breath and flavour elude the microscope. When science has done its best or its worst, we need the poet, the prophet, the seer, to interpret nature to us, not by analysis but by constructive imagination. "Nature exists," says George Macdonald, "primarily for her face, her look, her appeals to the heart and the imagination, her simple service to human need,

and not for the secrets to be discovered in her and turned to man's use. What in the name of God is our knowledge of the elements of the atmosphere to our knowledge of the elements of Nature? What are its oxygen, its hydrogen, its nitrogen, its carbonic acid, its ozone, and all the possible rest, to the blowing of the wind on our faces? What is the analysis of water to the babble of a running stream? . . . I would not be supposed to depreciate the labours of science, but I say its discoveries are unspeakably less precious than the merest gifts of Nature, those which from morning to night we take unthinking from her hands."

Let us not kill the poet in us for lack of listening and looking, the poet that dies so young in most of us. Let us cherish the passive, receptive mood with its simple intuitions and its high inspirations. We do not find the deep truths of life: they find us. Our part is only to incline the ear and open the heart. As rain and sunshine and balmy air fertilise the waiting earth, gracious influences envelop our soul if we are responsive. This is how the contemplative life breeds in men a rich wisdom, mellower, sweeter than all worldly activities, however varied, can achieve. Surrender is the first word and the last word in this process. That surrender is faith.

It is hard for human pride to submit, to make the surrender. How often it is pride alone which stands in the way of communion, pride of intellect, pride of heart, or the garish pride of life. We will not bend: we will not incline our ear: we will not open the door: we go on our self-willed and wayward path, and refuse to wait that we may see and hear. We disdain the simplicity of faith. We neglect the great, pleading, prophetic word, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come. . . . Incline your ear and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

If you live through this mysterious life on this mysterious earth with no outlook on the unseen and eternal, if spiritual truth sounds like an idle tale, if you act as if there were nothing to hear and nothing to learn, no secrets which God can whisper in your ear, if the great words of religion are as figures of speech; if, above all, you do not feel Christ's imperious claims and see His transcendent beauty and hear His insistent appeal, what is to be said but that seeing you see and do not perceive, and hearing you hear and do not understand? Is that not for you the judgment?

Nay, but I yield: I will incline mine ear to the

parable. "I will hear what God the Lord will speak: He will speak peace unto His people, but let them not return unto folly." He speaks that message of peace through righteousness by many voices, and not one of them without signification—in nature and grace, in providence and love, in history and experience, and in the face of Jesus Christ. If He spoke in the thunder and the whirlwind and the tempest, all the earth might keep silence for a startled moment. But not thus is the secret of His peace conveyed. You cannot hear that still small voice, unless you are still and incline your ear and submit your heart. The Lord Christ speaks to us not only by what He said, but by what He was and what He did. He speaks peace to us by His words of heavenly beauty and His deeds of gentle love, and by the blood and the tears and the passion and the cross. I will incline mine ear to that wondrous parable of the eternal love of God.

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

II

THE MISSING OF WISDOM

He that misseth me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.—PROVERBS viii. 36 (R. V. Margin).

THE Book of Proverbs might better be called the Book of Wisdom, which is the subject-matter of the first nine chapters, and wisdom of some sort is indeed the single theme of all the chapters. In the book, however, wisdom is not used in one definite sense like a mathematical term which has always the same value. It has many shades of meaning, adapting itself, so to speak, to the different levels of the matters treated on. Roughly, there are *three* distinct and separate senses in which the word is here used.

(1) First of all, at the ordinary level of life wisdom is used as the guide of conduct, meaning the discretion which life teaches or should teach, the sagacity in dealing with affairs, the knowledge of men and things that comes from experience. This is a common meaning in a book like this, which is a compendium of practical morality, and which seeks

to give good counsel to youth. As many of the proverbs show, wisdom means what we call common sense, and is opposed to folly, the stupid disregard of facts, the dulness of mind that will not learn the lessons that are patent on the very face of life. Thus, the book has many practical exhortations as to what to do in the ordinary problems that emerge every day, exhortations whose tone grows solemn and impressive as it warns against gluttony and drunkenness and the undue regard of wealth and kindred mistakes, even condescending to give advice about becoming surety for another. It is a sort of prudential morality, which experience loudly teaches to all who are not deaf. Wisdom in this sense stands for acute observation, shrewd judgment of events, astute discernment of men, in short, skill in the art of living—all that comes to a man who knows the cities and the ways of men. It has to do with the practice of life, the careful picking of the steps amid the entanglements that menace progress, and the difficulties that all must face. Wisdom thus implies some knowledge of human character, noting the results of actions, and prudently guarding against the consequences that inevitably flow from folly. The book is full of wise maxims of ordinary conduct, and if we call it the Book of Wisdom it must be

acknowledged that the wisdom is largely worldly-wisdom in the best sense of the term, taking to do with what we call the secular life.

It is not necessary to show how imperfect this conception of wisdom would be if taken by itself; as some of the very words we have used show the danger. When we speak of prudential morality, and astuteness of conduct, and shrewd judgment of men and things, and worldly-wisdom, we feel we are on a level that is low though safe. To this wisdom, necessary though it is to all in some degree, we could only partially apply the words of our text, "He that misseth me wrongeth his own self." We are all sufficiently alive, at least in theory, to the necessity for such wisdom; and men are trained in some fashion to acquire it; and most of us do gain some knowledge of men and affairs. We all undergo the education, which informs us of things, and fills our heads with facts and distinctions in varying degrees of usefulness or uselessness. It is quite true that to miss this worldly-wisdom which life should teach is to wrong one's own self. To have the means of knowledge in our hands and before our eyes and yet not to know, to have gone through life with our minds sealed, is to do despite to our own nature. To be incorrigible, unteachable, is to be (as the proverbs

again and again declare) brutish, like the fool with folly so ingrained that though he were brayed in a mortar with a pestle yet will not his folly depart from him. He that misseth me, says Wisdom as a guide of practical conduct, wrongeth his own self.

(2) But there is a deeper thought in the word as used in this wise book, a sense, too, which underlies all the practical counsels. Wisdom is looked on as identical with the law of God. It is the discernment that looks beneath the surface and sees cause and effect; looks into the heart of things and gets sane and true views of life, putting everything into correct perspective, a guide of the heart as well as a guide of the feet, a guide for thought and feeling as well as for conduct. In this deeper sense it teaches morals and religion. Its very beginning is in the fear of God, reverence for the good and the high. It deals with the moral basis of life, and looks upon evil, not simply as *mistake* which a wise man would avoid, but as *sin* which perverts and depraves the very nature. This inner, deeper wisdom judges human nature and human conduct by the religious ideal set forth in the law of God. It probes down to the causes which produce such tragic failure in the lives of men. It sees that life is built on law; so that to break law is not merely folly that incurs punishment

from the outside as by some machine that regulates all things, but is to break the law of our own life and sin against our own nature and wrong our own self. This sense of the word as the law of God is that in which the Psalmist prayed, "Teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom," that we may learn not worldly-wisdom but *wisdom,* the true meaning and purport and duty and destiny of life. Wisdom like this delights in displaying the fitness of what is good in the scheme of history and nature, pointing to a moral design both in human society and in the world at large.

(3) So, gradually we reach the third and further step which shows the word, as used in this book, clothed in personal attributes which make wisdom divine and almost identical with God. As being the quality which God displays in all His works, and being the root principle of the world, it is spoken of (in words that glow and catch fire) as a glorious Personality, the first-fruits of God's creative work, the very first-born of creation, not only presiding over the fortunes of men and disposing of human destiny, but as aiding God in creation, the divine Wisdom set up from everlasting, from the beginning or ever the earth was. It is in this sense as Wisdom personified that the word is used in this chapter, which one who

speaks with authority calls one of the most remarkable and beautiful things in Hebrew literature. We can understand how the Fathers of the Christian Church used this passage to illustrate their thought about Christ, the Logos, the Word of God, the incarnate wisdom and love and righteousness of God, the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature, who is before all things and by whom all things consist; and we can see how they should apply to Christ the beautiful words of this passage, "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me. Whoso findeth me findeth life and shall obtain favour of the Lord."

(1) These two last senses of the triple use of the word in Proverbs easily merge into each other—wisdom as identical with the law of God as the moral basis of life, and Wisdom as personified as of the very Godhead itself. We have already seen what measure of truth there is in the first sense as mere worldly-wisdom when our text is applied to it, that a man does wrong himself when he shuts his mind to the experience and lessons of life, and so misses ordinary wisdom. It only remains to apply the text to the other two deeper senses of wisdom.

(2) To miss the wisdom that cometh from above,

to fail to recognise the true relationship of life with the universal law of God, is indeed to wrong ourselves. It is to belittle man and do dishonour to human nature. To believe it in any sense true of wisdom that

> She doth preserve the stars from wrong,
> And the most ancient heavens by her are fresh and strong,

and to deny that that same law has meaning and purpose with human life, is to make the whole universe a hideous dance of unreason. And if without this faith there seems no foothold for intellect, still less is there for morals. To be men in all that hitherto has stood for manhood at its best, we must believe that our moral life is related to a moral law which is rooted in the very nature of things; we must believe that man is so related to God that the will of God, the law of God, is the law of our own life, and that to miss this, to sin against this, is to destroy ourselves. This is why, according to the Bible, sin is among other things foolishness, insensate folly, a mad choice of death. To break the commandments is not merely to break a system of rules arbitrarily imposed from the outside on us, but is to sin against ourselves, and to ruin our own

true happiness, to dim the radiance of our own souls, and to desecrate our own life.

In moments of self-revelation we see that it is so, that it was no alien hand that struck the blow, that our own silly hand turned the knife to our heart, that we wronged ourselves when we sinned against this high wisdom, against the moral law which lies at the root of the world. To hate this wisdom, to hate this goodness by which we can only truly live, is to be enamoured of death, a very frenzy of insanity. To miss this wisdom is to miss life itself. Sin is not only foolishness, therefore: it is suicide, self-inflicted wrong, killing the man in us, pouring out the very blood of our life. To have lived and with all our getting to have missed wisdom, to have missed the blessedness of accord with God's holy law, is failure. And in all the world's sore tragedy there is no failure so tragic as this. As the years pass by us and the shadows gather round us we look back, and the keenest sting is the thought of what we have *missed* by the way, what we might have been and done and received, and failed to be or do or get. When we have given way to passion or evil desire, when we have sinned against conscience or heart, when we have slid down to lower levels of

thought and life, how we have wronged ourselves! No enemy hath done this, but we ourselves. Fools! we have been our own worst enemy. "So foolish was I, I was as a beast before Thee." Folly! It is madness. "He that misseth me" (wisdom, the eternal law of all living) "wrongeth his own self. All that hate me love death."

(3) Further, as if to make this madness more impossible still, wisdom is here set forth not only as a law but as a Person—not a law to be scrupulously adhered to, but a Person to be loved and followed and obeyed, a fair and winsome Personality whose delight is with men, who opens his lips with words of sweet counsel, who loves those who will love him, and is found of those who seek him. And when we look into this fair picture of Wisdom personified, we cannot distinguish it from the very God of very God, revealing Himself to men, entering into human history, rejoicing in His habitable earth, standing as Wisdom stands beside the gates at the entry of the city, crying that all may hear, "Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men." This personified wisdom in this passage from Proverbs is vague and shadowy, and is after all an abstraction, but we are dull of heart if we do not see it to be in line with the

deepest revelation of all religion, and dull of heart if we do not let it speak to us of Christ. It is to us as a dim foreshadowing of the Incarnation itself. In Christ we see not only Wisdom incarnate, but Love incarnate. For the blurred figure of a Wisdom coeval with God and yet making her dwelling-place with men, we have the figure of Christ, the Wisdom the Word of God made flesh, entering into our human lot a helpless child, drinking the cup of human life and tasting what it is for a man to die.

Surely we see the glory of it. There rises before us the vision of a face full of pity and of pain, pleading with a look that almost breaks the heart of the man who sees it. Back from the mystery of the cross to the mystery of the manger of Bethlehem, through the wondrous life full of grace and truth, giving men His own assurance of God, His own joy and peace, making it possible for men to live in the power of an endless life. In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He is the Light, and the Light is the life of men. Surely we needs must love the highest when we see it. But do we? Do we recognise it to be the highest when we do see it? Do we feel as the light flashes upon heart and

conscience that this life in Christ is the only worthy, the only true life for man? To bend to Christ is to bend to the highest in man, in our own nature. In Him we are only fulfilling ourselves, reaching what we were meant to be, entering into life, fulness of life. It is unutterably true of Christ, truer than ever it could mean to writer or hearer of the Proverbs, "Whoso findeth Me findeth life," and "He that misseth Me wrongeth his own self."

To be in the midst of the Christian years and yet not to know Him who gives them meaning; to miss Christ though He is passing by in our midst; not to have the sharp, sweet sting of Christmas joy that unto us a child is born, Jesus who saves His people from their sins; to be within reach of His glorious personality and to lose Him, is to lose one's own true self, to lose one's chance of life. No other gain can compensate for missing this. All other gain is loss compared to this. To love Him is to enter into life. To be in Him is to live for evermore. To miss Him, the altogether lovely, is to wrong your own soul. To hate Him is to love death.

III

THE REINCARNATION OF CHRIST

My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.—GALATIANS iv. 19.

IN dealing with the Galatians St. Paul was dealing with a case of apostasy, a distinct decline from the faith as he had preached it to them. False teachers had come among them and had drawn them back into legalism of creed and of life. They turned from the freedom and spirituality of the Gospel to the laws and formalism of Judaism. And it looked as if St. Paul's work among them, which had been so successful, had been in vain. The Apostle uses every means of persuasion, by solemn warning, by tender entreaty, by touching the chord of memory, by appeal to their regard for him and his affection for them, in order to recall them to their allegiance, not to himself but to his Master and theirs to whom they had plighted themselves.

This verse of our text is full of the natural emotion which such a situation as we have sketched

must call forth. The very form of the sentence suggests mingled rebuke and appeal. "My little children," he says, using the diminutive of the word for the only time in all his writings, with a kind of pity for their weakness and foolishness in being so led astray, and also with the tenderness which the thought brings that they are but little children after all, and *his* little children, over whom he has the right of love. He reminds them that they owe their whole religious life to him, that he it was (and not these intermeddlers who came in later and arrogated the place of teachers) who brought to them the good news of the grace of God and told them of Jesus the Saviour. With passion for their souls and an agony of love for them he had brought them out of darkness into light; he had travailed in birth for them; and now again he undergoes sorer pangs on their behalf, with fear and pain and desire. It is because he loves them that he carries them on his heart, loves them as a mother loves her helpless babe. "My little children, of whom I travail in birth *again*."

There is a sting in that word "again," a sting of unavailing love for Paul, a sting of rebuke for them. That he should have to write to them as though the past had never been, as though the old relation-

ship between them were a thing of no moment, that was surely a painful thing for both Paul and his converts. They will lie on his heart in the pain and unrest of desire until—not merely until they come to Christ as before humbly and believingly, but until Christ is formed in them, or rather until they have become so closely united to Christ that they shall have taken the form of Christ. Here also is the mingled rebuke and loving desire. It is not merely that he wants the best for them and will not be satisfied till they receive the best; but also that he cannot trust them now. He cannot now be happy even in their faith till he is sure that their faith is justified and established. He had travailed in birth for them before. He had loved them into life, and with great joy had seen them safely into the Kingdom. They had started well, but had been hindered, had fallen back from Christ; and now again he travails for them—and will travail —until Christ is formed in them.

St. Paul's sorrow and panic of fear has had many subsequent illustrations in the history of the Church. Many like Pliable have started with Christian in the new way, and turned back at the first obstacle. Of how many since could St. Paul's rebuke be repeated, "O foolish Galatians, who hath

bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth?" after having once seen and known the truth. How often could it be said, "Ye did run well"—shaped fairly for the mark—"who hath hindered you?" It is something to have been gripped and held once by the attractive power of Christ, to have had the eye lighten by the splendour of the vision; but what if it only fade into the common light of day, what if the life give the lie to the faith? The passion of Christ and the passion of Christ's servants will not be over, till there be evidence of perseverance unto the end, till Christ be formed in them, and they grow up into the full stature of Christ.

This is the great Christian task. St. Paul's desire for his converts does not refer merely to the further instruction they might receive in the faith, fuller knowledge of Christian doctrine, completer insight into Christian truth. It is the recognition that the new life which began in them suddenly has, like all life, to grow to maturity, forming and fashioning itself according to its nature—and that nature is Christ. They must develop the Christian character, and live out the Christian life. It is not a system of teaching merely, but a new principle of life, which takes root and assimilates elements of its environment, transforming them into new forms of life.

The beginning of this process is when a man becomes a Christian, but that is only the beginning of a process, the goal of which is that he is a man in whom Christ lives. It is a spiritual transformation after the image of Christ. No part of the being of man is to be left out of this great scheme; the body and its members are to be the body and members of Christ and to be treated as such; the mind is to be the mind of Christ; the heart is to be the seat and throne and sanctuary of Christ. What a glorious conception this is of the Christ-birth in a man, until he becomes a veritable reincarnation—until you have taken the form of Christ is St. Paul's ideal, until you are no longer you but Christ, reclothed in flesh and human attributes by Him, so that you can say with some measure of truth, as St. Paul himself could say, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

It is St. Paul's great aim and endeavour that he may be so associated with Christ, so united to Him, may so know Him, that he may experience the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, and even be made conformable unto His death. What do these wonderful words mean? They mean that his desire is so full of Christ that he would fain miss nothing of the Master's experi-

ence—be the same, do the same, suffer the same. identify himself wholly with his Lord. And this not only in the sense of going over in imagination the scenes of His earthly life and passion in sympathetic thought, though that may be a valuable and helpful exercise. One great use of an intimate knowledge of the simple Gospel story is to accustom ourselves to the Master's point of view and manner of life, and so to make His teaching our test of conduct and His life our example. We can practise the presence of Christ in this simple way, living over again with Him His life in the world, going with Him through all His experiences and identifying ourselves with His life and death and triumph. It purifies passion and cleanses the very heart thus to go with Him in sanctified imagination through His earthly life, and to say to oneself through it all that He is the same to-day in nature and in purpose.

But it is deeper identification still that St. Paul desires for himself and for others. He comes to the heart of all spiritual religion, that we can abide in Christ as the branches abide in the vine, and Christ abide in us as the life of the vine is the same life in the branches, the part in the whole and the whole in the part. It is not the outside recognition of the facts of Christ's life and death,

but inward appropriation of His spirit, so that living faith becomes not merely trusting to the facts of our Lord's incarnation and death, but having them re-enacted again within ourselves.

> Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born
> But not within thyself, thy soul shall be forlorn ;
> The cross of Golgotha thou lookest to in vain
> Unless within thyself it be set up again.

This is the eternal truth of all mysticism. This is also the essential meaning of the great solemn act in Holy Communion with its symbols of eating the body of Christ and drinking His blood. It stands for a far deeper mystery and a more wondrous miracle than transubstantiation, the changing of the bread into the actual body of our Lord. In the presence of this other mystery that is but a childish interpretation, like a trivial piece of magic. Not that the bread is changed into the body of Christ is the Real Presence, but that we who eat the flesh of the Son of Man are changed spiritually, and the very Christ is formed in us. This is the purpose of the Sacrament, and the purpose of the faith itself, till for each of us it is no longer I but Christ that liveth in me. This is the central truth of St. Paul's whole message, a truth which he never tires of repeating in changing forms: "Put on the

new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created him."

It is the goal this, the ideal, the completion of the Christian life, the end that shall yet be by God's grace, when a man grows up into the full stature of Christ. Yes, it is the goal, but it is not to be postponed and put away by us as some far-off event that may be looked for in the future. It is a *present* task. Would we know the method of attempting the task? It is a simple secret. The practical working of it for us is that we bring every thought into subjection to the obedience of Christ. This is the psychology of it, superimposing Christ's will and mind over ours, desiring to serve and please Him and not ourselves, making Him in all things our conscience, and bringing everything to the test of that conscience. Let Him colour opinion and thought and judgment and desire and ambition and hope, transforming them all into His own glorious purposes. Is there any ideal in life which for grandeur can be compared to this, that we should—in love, in desire, by patience, by hope, by prayer—so submit our very life to Christ, until we have taken the form of Christ, and He be formed in us? This is the Christ-birth of which the birth in Bethlehem was a shadow and a prophecy.

A practical implication of this high doctrine, and one which suggests duty and responsibility, is that Christians are Christ's representatives on earth. It is not the ministry who are Christ's representatives but all Christians, who stand for Christ. If there be nothing of Him in us, if we are only His in name, we are not only losing our own chance but are dishonouring Him. His Kingdom can only come as His representatives state the case for the Kingdom, not in words, not in a rational defence of the faith, but in character and life. Ye are epistles known and read of all men. It is the only way of converting the world, as soul takes fire from soul, and faith begets faith, and the spectacle of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost awakens desire in those who see. Height answers height, deep calls to deep, the deep of your Christian experience to the deep of another's need. The only irresistible testimony is that of actual Christlike lives. Are we in any vital sense *stating the case* for the King?

Such is the demand made upon you. It is not that the world will be persuaded by a few grand examples of sacrifice, and that therefore, if the faith can but produce these exceptional cases, it is all right. These have never been wanting, but in them

selves would only make men wonder and admire and then pass them by as exceptional. When Moses' desire is fulfilled that all the Lord's people should be prophets, when all Christians realise their high calling, who could gainsay it? If we had the mind of Christ, if thought and feeling and ambition were being subdued to His allegiance, if His love were manifest in us, living sweetly and humbly in His presence, then would be displayed the unanswerable argument for God.

Oh, to have at hand such an argument, as in the days when men could take notice of disciples that they had been with Jesus, or the days when men said in wonder and attraction, "Behold these Christians, how they love one another!" To be able to point on all hands to living epistles, simply and plainly telling their story, unconsciously repeating the story of the Father's love, moving men's hearts with the pang of desire, convincing the world of God—amid the restless, fretful fever showing peace, amid strife and anger and hatred displaying love, amid vanity and worldliness and selfish schemes whose fruit is bitterness pointing to a path high up among the hills of God, a path that ends at the gates of the beautiful City. Can the task of the Church be anywhere near completion until its

members are thus mute (it may be) but eloquent witnesses to the power of God unto salvation? Can your own task be said to be more than begun, and must not the best lover of your soul travail again and yet again in birth for you, *until* Christ is formed in you, until you can make the glorious confession, "The life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me"?

IV

LOT'S CHOICE

Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.—GENESIS xiii. 11.

LOT had followed the fortunes of Abram from the time when he emigrated from Ur of the Chaldees. There seems to have been a mixture of motives in his mind, partly religious and partly selfish. He believed in his uncle's future and no doubt was impressed with his nobility of character, and doubtless with some stirring of heart, with sincere feeling, he had thrown in his venture with Abram. They had shared in each other's poverty and hardships, and now shared in each other's wealth. Driven to Egypt by hunger and want of rain, they had returned men of substance, rich in flocks and herds. They moved together as of old among the hills of Canaan, forming one encampment, the two heads of two companies seemingly united as before.

Not for the first time nor the last in human ex-

perience was it found harder to bear prosperity than adversity. When they were poor, uncle and nephew had no difficulty in keeping together and sharing one fortune. But wealth divided them, introduced friction, and ultimately forced them to separate. The dividing of the inheritance is responsible for much dividing of hearts. "Look at a file of your sister's letters," says Thackeray, "how you clung to each other till you quarrelled about the twenty-pound legacy!" In this story of patriarchal times we see how the possession of property brought with it new social problems for the primitive family. In this case the difficulty began not with the principals but with their retainers. Before the difficulty struck the masters, the servants were at war. Jealousy about respective rights, and emulation to secure the better bargain, crept in. The shepherds strove to get the best grass and the best wells for their special herds; and Abram with his calm wisdom saw that it would be better to avoid all such unseemly quarrels by voluntarily separating. He took his nephew out to talk about it, and the two went to the top of a hill where an extensive view of the whole surroundings could be had.

There is something dramatic about this scene, not because the decision to be come to between the

two men was so simply but grandly staged, but because it meant the drama, ever old and ever new, wherein human souls make definite choice and fix their destiny. Abram with generous disinterestedness offers Lot his choice. "Let there be no strife I pray thee between thee and me, and between thy herdmen and my herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself I pray thee from me. If thou wilt take the left hand then I will go to the right; or if thou wilt take the right hand then I will go to the left." It was quite like Abram to do this, in keeping with his noble nature; and we would have expected to see such highmindedness met on Lot's part with equal magnanimity. Deep should call to deep, and height answer height. We expect greatness of soul to be responded to by similar greatness. But it does not follow that generosity meets its own likeness in others. The selfish take advantage of it, and sometimes call it simplicity, trade upon it, and only fall to lower depths in its presence. In this great crucial test of Lot's character he (as no doubt he often did before) met Abram's generosity with selfishness.

The presence of moral greatness either raises us or dwarfs us, either prompts us to rise to the occa-

sion, or tempts us to take advantage of it. The only way to avoid envy and detraction and malice about any kind of greatness in literature or art or business or life is to love it, to admire it, to be proud of it—otherwise we make ourselves smaller and meaner men than we would have been if we had not been brought into connection with the particular form of greatness. Lot lost his chance of meeting Abram's generosity with equal generosity. All that Lot possessed had come to him through Abram. He might have said, "Nay, it is not for me to choose. All I have is thine. Take thy choice and give me what is right." He would have kept his life from being compassed about with many sorrows, and have saved his old age from shame. But the world had taken possession of his heart. Egypt, which had been to Abram a discipline, had been to Lot a temptation. His imagination there was inflamed by the sight of wealth beyond dream. His soul was taken captive by the desire to be rich; and Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt.

Worldly advantage was the first element in his choice. He judged according to the world's judgment; he judged by the eye. His heart was allured

by the beauty and fertility of the plain, and it seemed only prudence and common sense to prefer that to a barren and scanty living among the hills. From the worldly standpoint he was right. There could be no hesitation to a worldly mind between the two alternatives. On the one side was the promise of wealth, its easy acquisition, and its seeming security of tenure—a well-watered land, rich and fertile. On the other side the gain was limited and hardly-won, and any day another drought could occur and sweep away everything, as before when hunger drove them to Egypt.

It is true there were other things to be considered, which would weigh with Abram, such as the religious aspect of the question. On the one side was the notorious godlessness of the people of Sodom, and all the risks involved in that. It is the kind of risk which a man like Lot takes with an easy mind, or if he does feel twinges of conscience about it he soon argues himself into compliance; for he does not mean to give up his own convictions and habits, his own higher way of thinking and manner of living. He wants to make the best of both worlds. He will just go near enough to Sodom to reap all the earthly advantages it offers, but will not submit himself to the defilements of the place. So we read that Lot at

first only pitched his tents *towards* Sodom. But when next we hear of him he is in the town, mixed up with its affairs, his daughters married to men of the place, and at the last involved morally in its ruin. It is the old story of the history of a sin, step by step, from its genesis in the desire, to its fruition in the act, and its end in corruption. "A man is tempted by his own lust, being drawn away by it and enticed. Then the lust when it hath conceived bringeth forth sin; and the sin when it is fullgrown bringeth forth death."

It was not for this that Lot had left Ur of the Chaldees with Abram. Surely one of his motives had been to be associated with his uncle in his religious aspirations; and in any case he had been long enough with him to be sure that no prospect of worldly advantage could possible seduce him to have any connection with such a place as Sodom, even to take from a thread to a shoe-latchet. Not for all the wealth of Sodom would he deny the vision of the Holiest he had received. Lot meant to have no part morally in the place. He only meant to reap the earthly advantage. And possibly not much evident harm could come to *himself;* his habits were formed; his life was more or less fixed in its tendency; the risk was very little that he would be infected by the

loathsome sins of the cities of the plain. And so he shut his eyes to the risks to his children, and likely enough argued that it was for their good that he made his choice, to make money for them, and advance them in life. Just as men to-day will take moral risks for their children, form associations for business purposes, introduce to their families with an eye to gain men whom otherwise they would kick out of their houses; or scheme for the worldly advancement of their children, closing their minds to the risk of contagion deadlier than disease; encourage their sons to form friendships that may be socially useful; marry their daughters to rakes if only they are rich enough; or they will toil and labour and strive and sin to amass wealth for their children's sake, giving them no moral and spiritual safeguards to save the wealth from being a curse. Is Lot's choice such an unheard-of thing, and Lot's reasoning so uncommon, and Lot's fate a story of olden time? But then as now, first and last, in olden and in modern days, this is the reading of the history of men and of nations, they that *will* be rich, that judge all things from the material standard, that make getting their one aim, that allow the world to eat out their heart, fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown

men in destruction and perdition. It is the judgment of the Apostle, and the judgment of history; for it is the judgment of God.

The lonely man on the hilltop, lonelier now that he had made still another sacrifice, seemed to have made a poor bargain when Lot left him for the fertile plain. He too had made a choice, and choked back the craving of his natural self, and elected to make renunciation. But he was blessed with a new revelation of God, and came out with a deeper nature and a stronger character, a calmer peace and serener faith. God was his portion. Lot in effect made the great refusal, turned his back upon the highest, chose the world, and got Sodom for his portion; and was dowered with the worldling's withered heart and enfeebled will, and in the end shame and ruin and "self-contempt bitterer to drink than blood." This scene on the hilltop is not just idle drama. It represents the tragic choice which in one of its numberless forms comes to every human soul. Amid all the disguises and the false issues, the one line of cleavage runs through all life. The alternatives are but two, the choice of the world and the choice of God, the material or the spiritual, the self-life or the Christ-life.

Now the power of the temptation to Lot, as it

is the power of it to us, was that the good of the one alternative was *present;* while the good of the other seemed distant. The one could be had at sight; the other only through faith. The one was fact, a good to be grasped at and caught here and now; the other was promise, a good that was elusive, something to be believed about, not to be seen and tasted. When Esau is pained and famished with hunger, why should he not give up a far-away thing like his birthright for the present good? When the wild passion is in Cain's heart, why should he not give way to its resistless force? When the lust kindles in David's eye, why should he not satisfy it when he has the power? When the sound of the silver is in Judas' ear, why should he not at least get that much gain out of a sinking cause? When Paul was in prison and the company of missionaries were scattered and the might of Rome barred the way, why should Demas waste his life for an intangible dream? "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world," sighed the Apostle. That is the power of the world to Demas, to Lot, to all of us, that it is *present.* The seduction of the world is that it is here, palpable, to be had now. It presses on the mind: it presses on the senses. To exercise self-control for the sake of a

future blessing, to put off a present good for a prospective good, needs strength of character and will, and, above all, faith. To accept hardship, or pain, or sacrifice now for some far-off good; to endure the cross for the joy before us—that is the act of faith. What can a man that walks by sight do, but take hold of the things that belong to sight and sense? The world that allures him puts its emphasis on the fact that it is present. It is here offering a life now, not to be waited for, or imagined, or dreamed about, but with real attractions of sound and sight and touch. By its nature it appeals to the senses. It is clamant, imperious, plucking us by the elbow in the streets, dangling its baits before our longing eyes, and finding an able advocate of its claims within our own breasts. It obtrudes itself upon us, and will give us no peace till we come to terms with it, submit to it, or subdue it.

Faith is the refusal of the small, for the sake of the large. Faith will make no decision, take no step, merely from worldly motives; for it sees past the immediate good to a richer, grander good. Worldly-wisdom is not wisdom; it is folly, the blind grasping at what is within reach.

> **A man's grasp is beyond his reach,**
> **Else what's a heaven for?**

It is folly, for any present good, to cut yourself off from your true life. A good conscience, peace of heart, faith, the vision of God, the hope of glory—it is a fool's bargain (let pot-house moralists prate as they may) to barter these for any mess of pottage. To rake in the dust-heap for scraps of treasure heedless of the golden crown to be had for the looking and the taking—that was Lot's choice, and that is the choice of every soul who seeks *first* the world. Demas thought he was doing a wise thing in leaving Paul when earthly success seemed lost, but this present world, seductive though it was to him, however much it brought him, was a poor, a contemptible exchange for the days and nights with Paul, and the life lived by the Son of God. And his name is an infamy. Lot thought he was doing a wise thing in making the choice he did, but a share in the wealth of Sodom was a pitiful substitute for a place in Abram's company, and a share in Abram's thoughts and faith. And the end was a ruined home, a desolate life, and a broken heart.

Which is the wiser choice? Paul and a Roman prison and Jesus Christ—or Demas and the present world and an apostate's mind? Abram and the barren hillside and God—or Lot and the cities of the plain and Sodom's shame?

V

COMFORT IN TEMPTATION

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.—1 CORINTHIANS x. 13.

ST. PAUL, in dealing with the special dangers and temptations of the Corinthian Church, points to the early history of Israel to warn and reprove. He mentions four sins of the Israelites as corresponding to similar temptations in Corinth—idolatry, impurity of life, unbelief, and murmuring. The punishment of these sins as recorded in the story of Israel is no idle tale, but, St. Paul declares, has its bearing on the circumstances of the Corinthian Church. "All these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come." There follows, therefore, a statement of the true attitude towards temptation for the guidance of the Christian converts.

The first word is one of *warning*: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"—a re-

buke of all presumption and wanton self-trust. One invariable petition of every Christian prayer must be, Lead us not into temptation! The more we know our own hearts and our own weakness, the less open will we be to the overweening vanity which courts danger. The very first principle of the right way to look at temptation is a distrust of self. It is not for us to enter lightly and wilfully into contact with evil, in prurient curiosity, or in self-confident presumption that we can touch pitch and not be defiled. We cannot trust ourselves to stand in slippery places where better men than we have fallen. To the pure all things are pure, but are we so certain of our motives, our purity of intention, our aloofness of soul, that we can afford to neglect the warnings of the wise? A man can come into relations with the darkest evils and festering corruption of life, if he go at the call of duty, with pity in his heart, and with desire for service, but only if he be panoplied by the love of Christ, and moved by Christ's passion for souls. Absolutely the first lesson about temptation in all our tempted lives is this one of warning, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

There is enough in this for a sermon; but I press on to St. Paul's second point, which is one rather of

encouragement than of warning. The first lesson is not sufficient; for it can only refer to some sorts of temptations, those which we can avoid by careful picking of our way. But with us it is not a case of seeking temptation—we are in it. It presses us round about, it meets us at every corner. Temptation is our environment, as much with us as the air we breathe. Have we to avoid it, to flee from it in a panic of terror? Nay, says St. Paul, we are not to seek it; and we are not to fear it. So, after the warning comes this word of encouragement, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man," or "such as man can bear" as the Revised Version translates it; literally "such as is according to man." That itself is a great comfort to sorely tried men, who have been called to be holy, and have been suffering from the plague of their own hearts and the seductions of evil around them. St. Paul assures the Corinthians that their temptations are not unprecedented, nothing extraordinary, no unheard-of dangers and difficulties. They are the common lot of man, the fire through which the ore is purified from the dross.

A young man thinks his situation is unique, that no one else has ever experienced the torment of awakened passions, or that he is afflicted by a brand-

new type of doubt: nobody has ever thought his thoughts, or feared his fears, or doubted his doubts. He proceeds to make excuses for himself on the score of his peculiar and exceptional circumstances, an unexampled temptation irresistible for flesh and blood, and he thinks he may be excused for giving way. How much more cause had the Corinthians to argue like this when temptation to them meant all the seductions of pagan life, all the allurements associated with idolatry, and in addition the persecutions from outside to those who gave up the popular idolatries! They might well imagine that their condition was unprecedented, and that they could hardly be blamed for seeking some compromise. Nay, says the Apostle, it is the same fight all the world over. The same temptations strike the same weak spot in the human heart, the same voices sound in men's ears, and the same desires make the same insistent appeal. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is *common to man.*

There is comfort in this thought. George Borrow relates how Lavengro met Peter, the Welsh lay preacher, who, though he led others to peace and pardon, thought himself a castaway. He believed that when he was a child he had sinned the unpardonable sin, and his life was clouded ever after with

the thought of the unparalleled depravity which made him, a child of seven, sin against the Holy Ghost. It began at school with his looking upon his schoolfellows with a kind of gloomy superiority, considering himself a lone monstrous being who had committed a sin far above the daring of any of them; and afterwards, though he could bring peace and comfort to others, he never could find it himself. Lavengro told him that in all probability even at school the other children were looking upon him with much the same eyes as he looked on them; and that his feeling was of very common occurrence among children. This was a new light to Peter, and was the beginning of a happier state of mind. His wife told Lavengro the blessed effect of his words, that they had altered the current of his ideas. "He no longer thinks himself the only being in the world doomed to destruction—the only being capable of committing the never-to-be-forgiven sin. Your supposition that that which harrowed his soul is of frequent occurrence among children has tranquillised him; the mist which hung over his mind has cleared away, and he begins to see the groundlessness of his apprehensions. The Lord has permitted him to be chastened for a season, but his lamp will only burn the brighter for what he has undergone." The next

Sunday Peter's sermon moved all his hearers to tears, as he preached to them of the Power, Providence, and Goodness of God.

But the comfort and strength of the thought is not that our trial is common to men and our temptations are the human temptations, but that other men have triumphed, and that we too by the same means can triumph. The temptations are not only such as are common to man, but also such as *man can bear*. Men have been there before, and by the grace of God have emerged, have found a way of escape. It is human to be tempted: it is human to withstand temptation. The trial is designed not that we may fall, but that we may rise. It is not merely to try us, to test the stuff of which we are made, but also to provide the occasion for producing stronger moral thews and sinews.

There is this further comfort that temptation has its limits if a man be but true. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." The finest commentary I know on this passage is a great sentence from one of Johnson's *Essays,* which Boswell says he never read without feeling his frame thrill: "I think there is some reason for questioning whether the body and mind are not so proportioned, that the one can bear all which can

be inflicted on the other; whether virtue cannot stand its ground as long as life, and whether a soul well principled will not be sooner separated than subdued." It is a noble thought whether it be universally true or not, and it is the strong root of Stoicism and a still deeper principle of the Christian life. We need to be braced by such a manly sentiment, which may be, Boswell thinks, bark and steel for the mind. We take so naturally the easy way, and give up the burden of being men in the highest sense. There is a courage which is only another name for faith. Many a battle is lost before the soldier leaves his tent. The first step to victory is to believe that the battle need not be lost at all. In many modern novels, which call themselves studies of life but are only studies of disease, it is assumed that to prove the presence of temptation is enough to explain and to excuse any moral collapse. We need the reassertion of the manly creed that virtue can stand its ground as long as life, and that no man is tempted above that he is able. To a true man there will ever be sufficient aid to withstand in the evil day, and having done all and fought all still to stand. At any rate Christian's armour, you remember, is contrived to protect from wounds only in the front.

A man came to Sir Andrew Clark complaining of depression, inability to do his work, and that he was tempted to rely on stimulants. Sir Andrew saw the perilous state and forbade resort to stimulants, and when the patient declared that he would be unequal to his work and would sink, he replied, "Then sink like a man." We need to have done with the servile creed that we must retire gracefully at the point of least resistance, that we must follow our impulses, and give in softly to every over-mastering temptation. The master will soon find a cowed and humble slave at that rate. Strength is got through the strain. It is only when there is hard and close fibre that a strong, enduring character can be cut out. Each life has its own besetting temptations, its own share of trial, and is menaced somewhere by danger. That is the natural environment for growth in grace and in gracious life. It is the common human experience for the training of character, for the making of true manhood and womanhood. To refuse to see the discipline is to empty life of any moral significance, and even to empty life of any meaning at all. But when we have a glimmering of the great and inspiring thought that this is the will of God for us, even our sanctification, we see how it must be, as St. Paul asserts, that "God is faithful, who will not

suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape that we may be able to bear it."

This is what faith does to a man in the dark hour of temptation. It does not remove the temptation altogether, which has still to be borne, but it makes a man able to bear it. It gives him courage and hope, and points ever to a way of escape. Without faith a man is in a *cul-de-sac*—a "blind alley" that leads nowhere, a blind alley without outlet where, when he is hard bestead, he fears he may be killed like a rat. It is enough for a man to see an open way, that there is a road out. Let him but see a gleam of blue beyond, and he is content to endure and fight. Faith assures him that there must be a way of escape, and when he knows that, then he is able to bear the present trial, or affliction, or temptation. He is sure of reinforcement just when the fight is fiercest, and he can endure as seeing Him who is invisible. He knows that it is by no chance that he is put in his corner of the field, and God is faithful and in His own time will make the way of escape.

"The door is open," said the Stoic, meaning that at the worst there was always suicide by which a man could cheat misfortune when it became too

hard to bear. That is the craven way of escape when life becomes intolerable, and trials too dreadful and temptations too sore. It is the refuge of the coward, or rather the refuge of unbelief that does not see the meaning of trial and the wide-open door of a Father's love. There is in every moral conflict a way of escape other than the way of dishonour or defeat, and craven as we are we need the strident note of rebuke, "Ye have not resisted unto blood striving against sin." Take courage. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. The door is open; and we can win it yet, if we will be faithful. When we are at the end of our resources, the deliverance comes.

"In the valley of Humiliation poor Christian was hard put to it, for he had gone but a little way before he espied a foul fiend coming over the field to meet him; his name is Apollyon. And Apollyon straddled quite over the whole breadth of the way, and a sore combat lasted for above half a day, even till Christian was quite spent. Then Apollyon espying his opportunity began to gather up close to Christian and wrestling with him gave him a dreadful fall; and with that Christian's sword flew out of his hand. Then said Apollyon, I am sure of thee now. But as God would have it, while Apollyon was fetching of his last blow, Christian nimbly stretched out his

hand for his sword and caught it, saying, Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall I shall arise, and with that gave him a deadly thrust. Christian seeing that, made at him again, saying, Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. And with that Apollyon spread forth his dragon wings and sped him away that Christian for a season saw him no more."

Take the whole armour of God, prayer, and watching, and courage, and hope, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit. Be sure that God is faithful and will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able. Know that there is always a way of escape, an open door into the peace of victory. The victory and the peace come through the assurance of God, when the tempted soul knows that the Lord Christ stands by him in the terrible hour. "For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave."

VI

THE AUTHORITY OF THE WILL

Ye will not come to me that ye might have life —St. John v. 40.

Our Lord in making His appeal to the Jews points to the evidence which should be enough to convince them. He takes them on their own ground, and uses evidence which they themselves admit. He first refers to the evidence of John the Baptist, whom they profess to believe to have been a man of God and a prophet. He was a burning and a shining light, and they were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. John bare witness to the truth, he himself declared that he was nothing but a voice, testifying to Christ, a forerunner of the King who was coming after him. If they believed John to be what they professed he was, they ought to have accepted his testimony.

But John's witness was, after all, only external evidence, and our Lord does not lay stress on it. Rather, He says, "I receive not testimony from man"; meaning that the essential evidence to which

He appeals is not from the outside, but spiritual evidence, the evidence of the fitness of His work and life. If they understood anything of God's real nature and mind, they would see that He the Son was revealing the Father. It was the Father's works He was doing, and they should bear witness that the Father had sent Him. That would be the effect of these works of mercy and power, if only they, the Jews, had any spiritual insight.

And further our Lord appeals to their own Scriptures, which they reverenced and made an idol. They could not read even their own Scriptures without seeing that they testified of Him, if they were not shutting up their minds with prejudice. Diligent students of the Old Testament as they were, it was only the letter of it they paid heed to, and let the spirit slip from their grasp. Their own Bible was Christo-centric, finding its meaning, and fulfilment, and ultimate justification in Christ. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy," as St. John says in the Revelation. Without Christ the Old Testament is only a torso, an unfinished broken trunk of the perfected figure. And yet they refused to admit what alone made their much-reverenced Scriptures intelligible.

What more could be done for them in the way

of evidence? They had the witness of one of their own prophets, of whom they were proud; the witness of their own conscience brought face to face with the actual life and works of Jesus; the witness of their own Scriptures, which they acknowledged to be the word of God. And yet they rejected their Saviour, wilfully, almost malignantly. In spite of such cumulative testimony, this is the sad conclusion which our Lord draws, "Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life." In spite of all evidence, in spite of the Father's purpose, in spite of the Saviour's sacrifice, in spite of all that love could do, man's will stood like an invincible barrier and frustrated the grace of God. It was not from want of knowledge, from lack of sufficient evidence, but from lack of will. They did not desire to open their minds to the new light, and burden their lives with new duties. Against the very Spirit of God they raised the ramparts of a stubborn will. "Ye will not come to Me," says our Lord, accepting human will as an ultimate, a final fact in the disposal of His claims.

That this should be so, that man should have such terrible power, seems the great mystery of our life; and yet it cannot be otherwise if we are to remain men. This place and power of human will

we must recognise. On the human side will is an ultimate in religion. It is a basal fact of life. We cannot get past it. So far as we have the disposing of ourselves, it is our will that disposes. All our thinking and all our acting are more or less under its control. It is the only real power over which we have control. By our will we command ourselves to act in any given case. Beneath an act there is the thought that moves it; beneath the thought there is the will that commands it; but deeper down than that we cannot go. Will sums up for us all that makes us ourselves, the very essence of personality. It means the controlling, dominating power of life.

In practical ethics there is nothing beneath or beyond the will. All action must be regarded as the fruit of the will. In common language we sometimes speak of having no will about any particular matter, and even sometimes speak of doing a thing against our will; but these are only inaccuracies of speech. We may do an act against our judgment, and against what we admit should be our will, against the better part of our nature; but all the same the will is the responsible agent of the act. Sometimes there is no recognisable effort of will; it may be done unconsciously. A particular class of acts may

have through long-continued use become organised into habit, until they are done without thought or conscious will; or even the force of habit or the appeal of desire may be so strong as to overpower the will. But it is the will nevertheless which operates. We may and do often deceive ourselves, thinking that the citadel of our will is intact though we have surrendered to evil in life, by pretending that a course of action is against our will and due to some necessity of our environment. But that only means that the particular motive or temptation has advanced sufficiently strong inducements to capture the power of will. When Romeo went to the old apothecary to purchase poison, without disguising that the poison was to be used for an illegal object, Shakespeare makes the apothecary give the poison for the sake of the reward, using this very temptation we are discussing as a salve to his conscience, "My poverty and not my will consents." Nay, it was against his conscience, against his better judgment, but not against his will. The temptation was too strong for his will; and the selling of the poison to be used for suicide *was his will.* The poverty was only the motive which drove his will in that direction.

We see how in all questions of morals we come

back to the will, and fasten responsibility there. If it were not for this, there could be no such thing as moral responsibility. Our conduct, like ourselves, is the result of the action of many forces, tendencies of heredity, environment, education. So much is this recognised that we are in danger of forgetting the judgment seat we each possess, and the power of initiative we have in our will. We might seem to be the passive sport of fate, if it were not for our will. This is the only place we can interfere, so to speak. It is to the will of man a preacher must address himself in the last instance. We may appeal to reason, and to feeling, but these are only to supply the necessary motive to the will. So all-important is the will in the moral judgment of a man that we can say as an unerring test that *according to the character of the will is the character of the life.* The philosopher Kant implied this when he declared that there is nothing good in the world but a good will, and nothing evil in the world but an evil will. In this sense will does not mean merely an isolated act of will done in the heat of a single emotion, nor even a series of acts, but the bent it has received and the quality it now possesses through repeated acts.

When we think of it, we see that it is only just that the judgment of a life should be according to the character of the will. It would be at the best a very shallow principle of judgment to take anything else, the outward acts, for example. For an act may in itself be good, but the motive at the bottom of it be evil, and the will which induced it be absolutely selfish. Of course in the long run a good will must result in a good life; and in the long run nothing but a good will can result in a good life. The character of the life is determined by the character of the will. Even in worldly business we know how men are separated into classes by differences of will. One man is of what we call a strong will, knowing what he means and wants, and usually getting it. The man of irresolute will is also of feckless life. But ethically the distinction is not so much one of amount of will, as one of quality. For great and magnificent goodness, strength of will is needed as well as right quality. But when the will is evil, the stronger it is, the further astray it leads a man. So that morally the point on which we must fix our attention is the character of the will.

You will see at once that this means a revelation of the life. When the mainspring of a man is an

evil will, when the will is tainted, the very source and fountain of life is polluted. This is not a matter of mere weakness of will. A man may be weak, and yet desire the highest, long for it; and it may be the sorrow of his heart, the keenest pang of his days and nights, that while to will is present with him, to perform that which is good is not, yet God knows he yearns after purity, and with tears and prayers seeks the holiness of God. Worse than weakness of will is wickedness of will. Worse than when a man knows good and wills it, and fails in the doing—infinitely worse is it when there is no will for good. Deepest of all depths is it when the will itself is evil; when a man says to himself, "Evil, be thou my good."

In a very true sense (blessed be His gracious and merciful name!) God takes the will for the deed. So weak are we, so hampered and harassed by the temptations of heart and life, how often have all God's children to lament with St. Paul, "The good that I would I do not, and the evil which I would not, I do." But God does not judge us by our achievement but by our aspiration, not by our sin but by our repentance, not by what is seen by the world but what is in our heart, not by the goal we reach but by the goal we aim at,

not by what we have attained but by what we follow after, not by our failure but by our will. In this sense it is true that there is nothing good in the world but a good will.

If then it is in the region of the will that men are tested, if the difference between a good will and an evil will is as the difference between heaven and hell, what is it makes a will good or evil? And how is this good will to be acquired? The answer to this question is the answer to both questions. A good will is in Bible language a will "conformed to the will of God." Our will is safeguarded and inspired, protected and driven by the will of God. This is the psychology of the Christian life, "It is God who worketh in you to will." The will, that is so given to God and kept by God and filled by God, is safe and grows into strength and beauty. This is no exceptional thing, peculiar, miraculous. It is a fact of common experience that our will can influence and dominate others, and that we can be dominated by another will. This is the basis of all leadership, and the explanation of many of the psychical phenomena of telepathy and thought-reading, so far as there is any truth in these. To have close fellowship with a great soul, to be inspired by a great will, is to

be lifted to a higher plane of living. In varying degrees we see this everywhere, with the strong general and his army, with the true leader of men and his followers, with the heaven-born teacher and disciples, with the orator and his audience, and with all inspiring friendships.

When it is God that worketh in us to will, we have the Christian life; we can understand heroic living; we can explain the Acts of the Apostles, the triumphs of grace, the victories of the Cross. St. Paul's statement is the statement of a scientific fact, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." A Christ-inspired will, a Christ-directed will, a will so conformed to His that "it is no longer I but Christ that liveth in me," that is the Christian ideal, and the Christian task of life. It is not, as is so often the case among men, the abject subjection of the will by which it is bent and broken. It is the full, joyous, free submission to a higher law, bringing power, strengthening itself at the Source of all strength.

But the will is free and has to be freely given. We are the masters of our fate to this extent. The evidence that Christ can be to us what He claims may be complete; reason may be satisfied, feeling may be moved, His appeal may come to

us with such insistence and such force that we quiver under it; and yet He may have to say of us as of the Pharisees of His day, "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life."

Conscious religion begins as an act of will. Until the will asserts itself, faith is only sentiment and idle emotion. Religion begins at the point of decision when we say with a true heart, "I will"; and the religious life is the long discipline in which the will is being conformed to the will of God, and so Christ is being formed in us.

If the character of your life is determined by the character of your will, you can set a value on your life by asking yourself what is your will? Is it inspired by selfishness? is it stubborn against good? is it weak before sin, and only strong before holiness?

Nay, further, you can get at the value of life by narrowing the issue still more, by asking what your will is in the presence of Christ's claims over you. As He makes His demand over your heart, as He presents His life of grace and truth, as He thrills you with the passion of His love, as He offers you salvation, as He pleads with you by His cross, as He stands at the door of your heart and knocks, as He calls you to a life of discipleship

and service; what is your will? What response do you make to the appeal of Christ to submit to His supremacy? Set your own value on your life as it is tested by this crucial trial.

May it be said of you, as of the Master Himself, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God."

Or must the Saviour say of you as one of a stiff-necked generation, "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life"?

VII

THE LAW SET TO MUSIC

Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.
—Psalm cxix. 54.

This verse is the keynote to this wonderful Psalm, and in a very real and deep sense is the keynote to the whole Psalter. The Psalmist may well say that God's statutes have been his songs, when the one and only subject of his Psalm is the praise of the divine law. Every verse of it lovingly circles round the contemplation of God's law, with marvellous variety expressing to his own happy heart its priceless value. His one subject is praise of the law, the duty of studying it, and the happiness of following it. He never gets away from that, not for a single verse. The law covers his whole life. There is nothing outside of the blessed circle, nothing the law does not touch and glorify. The subject of all his songs is God's law, its beauty and joy and peace, its power to control and direct and comfort. Life is a house of pilgrimage, a brief time of trial, and such songs

refresh him and sustain him. Life is a night of sleeplessness, and such songs beguile the waiting hours and solace his weariness. Life is a journey, and the road is long and sometimes hard, but such songs enliven every step of the way. And what are these magic songs? They are the statutes turned into music, the commandments delivered in perfect harmony, the law bursting into song, filling the singing heart with joy till the whole world joins in the harmony and reflects back the radiance.

The verse is also in one respect typical of the whole Psalter. The Book of Psalms is in five Books, to correspond with the Pentateuch, the five Books of the Law. This attempted correspondence to the Pentateuch is in a sense only formal so far as numbers go, but it is also very natural and appropriate. The Psalter is the flower of the law, reflects the essential spirit of Old Testament religion, represents its best and highest moods. The division of the Psalter into five Books expresses a great and true thought; for the Psalter is indeed the other side to the law, the completion of it, the response to it. A hymn is the true fruit of a commandment. The Pentateuch states God's will for man; and the Psalter is man's reply to it, man's adoration of God. It is the answer made by religious Israel to the

demands of Jehovah in the law. Statutes need to be turned into songs before their work can be completed. The note is struck in the very first Psalm, which speaks of the blessedness of loving the Law and the curse of hating it. The Psalter is the blossom of the Law, preparing for its perfect fruit in obedient and joyful hearts. When the law of God is turned into songs in this the house of our pilgrimage, it has reached its destined end. Thus this verse is really typical of the whole Psalter. "If people," wrote Ruskin, in *Modern Painters,* "would but read the text of their Bible with heartier purpose of understanding it, instead of superstitiously, they would see that throughout the parts which they are intended to make most personally their own (the Psalms) it is always the law which is spoken of with chief joy. The Psalms respecting mercy are often sorrowful as in thought of what it cost; but those respecting the law are always full of delight. David cannot contain himself for joy in thinking of it—he is never weary of its praise: "How love I Thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thy testimonies are my delight and my counsellors; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." Our text, then, is spiritually set in the very centre of the Psalter, and in the very

centre of the Old Testament. The law is really obeyed, when it is no longer mere rule and precept, and no longer something to be feared as when it flashed out its solemn warnings from Sinai, but when it becomes a delight, as music to the soul, changed into inner harmony, when it is a flooding passion of love for the Law of God, when the statutes are turned into songs in the house of man's pilgrimage. It ceases to be law in the rigid legal sense, and becomes perfect freedom.

Fletcher of Saltoun said in oft-quoted words, "Let me make the songs of a country, and let who will make the laws." Men are moved and influenced and touched to the heart by true noble songs. Compared with it, legislation influences life on the outside. Songs and poetry appeal to the emotions, and can draw men when the law could not drive them. The ideal is reached when, as with the Psalmist, the highest dictates of the law are transmuted into music, when the noblest thoughts of duty are made into songs.

> Perhaps it may turn out a sang,
> Perhaps turn out a sermon,

wrote Robert Burns in the first verse of one of his poems. The best sermons have some of the qualities

of the best songs—simple, direct, going straight to the heart, touching the emotions, making appeal to the deepest feelings of human nature, singing in the mind, striking the chords of the simple primordial elements. When the law comes in that attractive guise, not as something to be dreaded and sullenly submitted to, but something which brings light and joy and music to life, it has fulfilled itself. Obedience is in such a case not a necessity merely, but a privilege, an occasion of rejoicing. Though the sermon itself does not turn out a song, it achieves its purpose if it turns hearts to singing; for praise is the culmination of all the powers of man. The end of preaching is praying, it has been said. True, but the end of praying is praising. It is so here in our poor earthly worship: the purpose of both preaching and praying is served when men learn to praise God with humble and sincere and rejoicing hearts. And it shall be so hereafter, when "the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

Our lives are set in the midst of law, even

physically. We can only live under certain fixed conditions. We are in a network of cause and effect, governed and ruled and controlled by irrefragable law. The secret of life, even from a physical basis, is to learn the laws of the world and submit to them willingly and cheerfully. To make the best of them is the way to make the most of them. Every advance in material civilisation consists in discovering the laws that exist and adjusting ourselves to them. If we were to fight against them, sullenly acquiescing in them only when we, through pain and distress, found them to be inevitable, what a miserable life we would make of it! Imagine a man always protesting against the law of gravitation, never once accepting it as part of the conditions under which he must live, kicking against the pricks of necessity, an unhappy rebel in the domain of nature! If we refused to accept the fact that water will boil and that steam will propel, we can only sit down with scalded fingers and scowl at the hateful phenomenon. But if we take it and use it and harness it to the service of man as the engineer does, we turn the statute into a song, change the blind force into the poetry of motion. When practical science turns a necessity into a privilege, it has mastered the situation.

Similarly, our lives are set in the midst of moral law. Here too we are governed and ruled and controlled. The secret of life is to learn the laws of life and submit to them willingly and cheerfully. Obey them we must or suffer, just as truly as we must obey physical laws or suffer. Here too everything depends on the mood in which we obey, the attitude we take up with regard to moral necessity. The law of God comes to us with a categorical imperative, saying not Thou mayest, thou shouldest; but Thou shalt, thou must. We are preparing only sorrow for ourselves if we live a gloomy rebel in the domain of law, refusing to accept facts, to acknowledge obligation. It does not alter the facts, but only adds pain to our lot. If we chafe against duty, if we are ever seeking a loophole where we can transgress, we are laying rods in pickle for our own foolish back. Again, we may submit with nothing better than dull resignation. We may say in sullen tone, It is the will of God, and I suppose I must surrender. We may make a virtue of necessity in the mood of our phrase "grin and bear." We can creep about in the house of our pilgrimage with a lack-lustre eye, in submission but always in passive resistance.

Now, religion masters the situation by turning the very statutes into songs, till the house of pilgrim-

age rings with music. Before asking how it is done, let us be sure of the fact that it has been done and can be done. How often we hear that triumphant note in the records of religion, when a man's life moves in harmony with the rhythm of God's works and worlds. "O how love I Thy law!" cries this same Psalmist. "I delight to do Thy will, O my God," sang another Psalmist; "yea, Thy law is within my heart." "His commandments are not grievous," asserted the Apostle John. Duty, which sometimes seems so irksome and heavy, may be transformed till it is welcomed as a gracious guest. The burden somehow is transmuted into music. Duty so accepted, not as a necessity merely but as a joyful privilege, is transfigured with light. Wordsworth's great *Ode to Duty* is not a mere poetic affectation.

> Stern Lawgiver! yet thou dost wear
> The Godhead's most benignant grace;
> Nor know we anything so fair
> As is the smile upon thy face:
> Flowers laugh before thee on their beds
> And fragrance in thy footing treads.

When the will of God is accepted as a privilege, when it is no dull task to which we merely submit but is made our will in eager desire and bounding joy, when we take it in cheerful, willing, ready obedi-

ence, we are safe—and only then are we safe. The statute has no secure hold on us till it sings in our life and is a delight. When it is only an external thing, a matter of constraint, a routine duty performed without spring and without heart, it has left no real and permanent mark on us. The law has begun to do its perfect work on us, when it is accepted not in the service of a routine order but in the service which is perfect freedom.

What can do this? What can turn the statutes into songs, take the sting out of the commandments, make the will of God a delight? When it is all transfigured by the glory of love. Love inspires obedience to law, and makes it easy. If we see law not as something external, an obligation imposed on us from without, a despotism against which we cannot rebel, and to which we can only sullenly submit; if we see law as the law of our own life, the fruit of the tenderest and highest love, the commandments are seen not to be grievous, and obedience becomes sweet and natural. We know the difference between obedience dictated by fear and obedience dictated by love. When we are brought into a personal relation to God and enter into fellowship with Him, we realise that even in the making of our own moral life, in the creating of our own char-

acter, we are fellow-workers with God. We desire the same end as He does, and it is the best end.

The love of Christ is the great instrument of sanctification; for it breeds in us a passion to do God's will and keep His commandments. "Ye are complete in Him," says St. Paul. He fills out our incompleteness, and for the first time we feel that we are truly ourselves, and for the first time really possess our souls, and are in harmony with the great end of our existence. When our heart is enlarged we can run in the way of God's commandments. Life breaks out into music and light. The obedience which the law demands, which at first promised only to bring constraint and a gloomy darkening of life's joy, is the spring of happiness and peace. In the joy of reconcilement we are in accord with God's will for us, and are in tune with the whole universe. We know the service which is perfect freedom. The house of our pilgrimage is made glad with music. Life laughs back its radiance in the sunshine of God's smile. If we could say with the Psalmist, "O how love I Thy law!" we would have no difficulty in understanding how he would say, "Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage."

VIII

THE TEMPTATION OF DISTANCE

Wisdom is before the face of him that hath understanding: but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.—Proverbs xvii. 24.

The contrast of this text is that a wise man considers duty, seeks to understand the real and important issues of life, tries to discover the principles and laws of right conduct; but the man of no understanding has no insight into the bearing of the things he is faced with every day. They are as if they were not for him. He has a soul too high to be concerned about details; but it is really because he is too unstable to be truly serious about anything. The man of sense and discretion has to consider large things and far-off events, things distant and future, but he is always anxious to relate them to the actual needs of life. He makes it his aim to translate principles into action. Above all, present duty is a master-word to him. The fool does not attempt to comprehend anything. He is afflicted by feebleness of purpose. Of flighty and

confused mind, he moves rapidly from subject to subject, the more unreal and impracticable the better, the farther away from the needs of actual existence and the demand for present decision the better. He is unable to attend to the examples and warnings and duties that are under his very nose. Experience has no lesson for him, and the present no claims on him. And there is a species of fool who does this on the plea that he is taken up with larger things, matters of wider moment; that he has no time for simple duties, engrossed as he is in his large speculations. These duties may obtrude themselves before his eyes, but his eyes are in the ends of the earth. It is this special kind of folly we would consider now, which we must remember is not confined to the complete and finished specimen. In the wisest men there are strains of folly, streaks of foolishness—at least, moments of aberration. Certainly, wise or not, we all have temptations along this line of our text.

But at the very beginning we must discriminate if we would judge clearly the real thought of this proverb. It is not folly, but wisdom, for a man to have large views and a wide outlook. The worst fool in the world is the man who will admit

nothing that he cannot see or feel or taste, who has no place for imagination or vision or faith. He may call himself a severely practical man, or a business man, or a scientific man, or label himself what he likes; but there is no folly like that of the man who shuts himself out from the great universe of thought and feeling and poetry and religion; who never looks out and away, and never looks up and beyond; who takes no wide sweeps of vision, and whose eyes are never focussed for the large distances. Even in business the great business man may be said to be the man who has his eyes on the ends of the earth, who has the courage to make big ventures, who knows something of how economic laws work, and how some scientific laws work, so that he may relate them intelligently to his particular business. The truly practical man is not made the less but the more practical by knowing theory as well as practice, and by giving scope to his whole nature as well as the special functions he exercises in his daily work. The great scientific men have not been merely observers, but have had a touch of poetry in them, have used a disciplined imagination, and have searched for laws and broad generalisations to group their facts of observation. There is a commonplace and prosaic

mind in all branches of activity which would gladly use this proverb to throw contempt on the philosopher, the poet, the seer, the dreamer, and the man generally who is not content with the narrow round of the immediate and the practical. The opportunist statesman does not love the man who is anything of a doctrinaire, who has principles of statesmanship and uncomfortable theories of reform that put the Parliamentary machine out of gear. The pillar of law and order in society looks askance at the fervid social reformer, who speaks of large reconstruction and has ideals of Utopia for the world. The commonplace scientist, who does excellent work—it may be in classifying and cataloguing beetles—sneers at those he calls visionaries and idealists. The practical materialist despises the man who is interested in spiritual issues and who asks for space for the human soul to soar.

That sort of narrowness, so common in various ways, gets no support from the contrast of our text. The Proverb declares that the man of understanding has wisdom before his face, uses wisdom to deal with the affairs that emerge before him, puts the law of life in practice day by day; whereas the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth, wandering fitfully hither and thither, never recognising the meaning

of events and the lessons of experience, taken up with anything except present duty. It is the same thought as in the other proverb in Ecclesiastes, "The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness." To him it is as if he had no eyes, for they ever roam in waywardness from the plain duties that lie near.

There is need to all of us for the warning against this sort of folly. We all know something of the attraction of distance, the romance of the unknown; and we are inclined to minimise present opportunities by dreaming about some larger sphere where we would do great things. Not here, but somewhere in the ends of the earth, is the occasion we need to draw out our unsuspected powers. The first duty is the duty near at hand; but that is too small for the fool whose eyes are in the ends of the earth. The distant, the far-away affects imagination easily; it can soar and fly without breaking wings against hard facts. Some think that it is because they are of superior nature, of a finer texture of imagination, that they take no interest in the life around them, but divert themselves with vain dreams, building castles in the air, turning ever towards the ends of the earth for their high thoughts and noble aspirations. But really, such an imagination is of

the commonest and lowest type. It is lack of imagination to be unable to enter with insight and sympathy into the common life around, to see only the commonplace in what is common, to see none of the romance and pathos and heroism of lowly life. Even from the point of view of art that is the triumph of imagination, to throw a glory round the usual and interpret the common in loving sympathy. Any one can imagine thrilling adventures in China or Peru or in the islands of the sea, but few can show us the treasures of heart and soul in the common life ungilded by the halo of romance. Truly wisdom is before the face of him that hath understanding, but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.

It does seem a natural folly, for we have such varied illustrations of it. They are so common that I can only mention some, and perhaps we will make the application to ourselves if any of them happen to fit. We find men with a passion for humanity at large, with little consideration for single men; full of fine sentiment about the progress of the race, but never lifting a little finger to help a lame dog over a stile. They have high thoughts about man, but little thought for men. It is like having a great love of botany

without any love for flowers—and that, too, is not unknown. Some, again, have not such philosophical tastes, and do not pretend to worship humanity, but are very cosmopolitan in their interests, students of cities and the ways of men, or with high notions of duty as citizens of a mighty Empire, and at the same time with little sense of the duties of citizenship of their own town or village. Others whose circle takes a still smaller sweep have great zeal for the commonwealth, for the national life or for civic life, but habitually neglect home life. There are men of wide acquaintanceship, with friends in every quarter, with a perfect genius for fellowship if only they be of foreign feathers; for if they are masters they never take the trouble to know their own servants. There are those who seem to know a whole city-full who have no knowledge of their own workmen. There are women who are in our own homely proverb "angels abroad and devils at home," courting popularity in many a distant quarter, and leaving the natural sphere uncultivated. There are specimens of what are universally known as good comrades —hail-fellow-well-met with crowds—but neglectful husbands and fathers. A working man told me

of one he knew in his own trade who was a capable workman and earned the best wages, who had troops of friends, was never absent from a match or race-meeting, and took a wide interest in what is called sport, but who spent so much on his own pleasures that his wife had to go our charring to feed the children, and he was not ashamed among his hosts of friends. It is not an uncommon type, though there are few so bad as that. Our proverb thus has many applications in life, and is not merely a musty saying of no modern meaning. Some will burn with indignation over a story of far-off crimes, a massacre in China or Armenia, who have no flame to spare for wrongs nearer home. Their eyes, like the fool's, are in the ends of the earth. If they saw clearly and felt deeply some of the daily wrongs of men and women and little children in our cities, they would move swiftly to the aid of all who work and pray for the Kingdom of Heaven to come in our midst.

If a man love not his brother whom he hath *seen,* how can he love his brother whom he hath *not* seen, to say nothing of loving God? The first duty is the duty near at hand. Wisdom can do its work on the things that are before our

face. It would be nothing to be transported to the ends of the earth; the foolish eyes would still be on the horizon, looking past and over the facts of the case and the duties of the situation. We might be given our vain dream of a new environment and a large and distant sphere, without having a pennyworth more wisdom to recognise our opportunities. Only by accepting duty here and now, only by taking advantage of the day of small things, will we be made fit for anything bigger. Only by humbly and simply following the light we possess, will we be saved from the remorse of lost opportunities, "They made me keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept."

Not only does work and life suffer from this cause of failure, but we ourselves suffer, and our appreciation suffers. It is a foolish thought that far birds must have fine feathers, but in every sphere we are tempted to think so, and thus to lose true perspective of our actual possessions. I once met people from London in Florence, assiduously doing the round of the picture galleries. Talking about certain old masters, I mentioned that there were some good specimens of their work in London. In astonishment they

asked where in London, and when I spoke of the National Gallery, I discovered, this time to my astonishment, that they had never been there. Consumed with a passionate love of art, and living all their days within a walk of one of the greatest galleries in Europe, they had never taken the trouble to go. Perhaps they were the people described by the old Scotsman in Kingsley's *Alton Locke,* as "Puir bodies who would rather hear an Italian dog howl than hear an English nightingale sing." The materials of wisdom are often before our face, while our foolish eyes look away to the ends of the earth Our true opportunities are so near that we stumble against them every day, while we are mooning over some far-off chances and distant prospects. Our first duties are the duties to our hand, while we wait for some great occasion. All the glory of life, all the romance of living, all the deep and true joys of the world, all the splendour and the mystery are within our reach if we had but eyes to see and hearts to understand, while we despise our possibilities and cast scorn on what we deem the trivial round. We long to be the keeper of the vineyards, while our own vineyard we do not keep. We would play the hero if we had the fit occasion;

we have a soul above our lot; we dream of what we might be and do, and all the time—

> The primal duties shine aloft like stars,
> The charities that soothe and heal and bless
> Are scattered at the feet of man like flowers.

The Christian faith means the consecration of the common things. There is nothing common or unclean, no sphere too petty that it cannot become a place of service, no lot too circumscribed that it cannot be illumined with the glory of love; no detail too insignificant that it counts for nothing. Let your life widen out in circles. Begin at the centre and describe the circle you can easily fill; then a little bigger if you become capable of that. Let the occupation of the circle of life be real and effective before you sigh for unconquered territory. Accept the opportunities you already possess. Unfaithfulness in the small things is like deserting your post. Curb the foolish eyes that would look to the ends of the earth for a sphere of action. The true wisdom of life is before your face if you will but open your mind and heart to it. Not lo here or lo there, but behold the Kingdom of Heaven is within you. God is not far from any one of us, if we will take and taste and see that the Lord is good.

Where shall I serve God? First of all, where you are. How shall I serve God? In the consecration of the common affairs, by faithfulness in the day of small things, by patience and faith and hope and love displayed in actual life. When shall I serve God? Now! Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

IX

REPENTANCE

And they went out, and preached that men should repent.
—St. Mark vi. 12.

"In repentance too is man purified: it is the grand Christian act," says Carlyle. It may truly enough be called the grand Christian act in the sense that everything depends on it, and that religion begins its perfect work there. There are perhaps grander Christian acts than repentance, but without it none of them is possible. It is not life itself, but it is the gate to life, the portal through which the soul must pass into the Father's House. All spiritual religion must begin with repentance. All the prophets prefaced their message with a call to repentance. Whatever difference there might be in their respective gifts and temperament, or in their times or spheres of labour, their message never varied in its essence. Standing as they did as witnesses for God and for God's claims on His people, the call to repentance was the logical beginning of their work. This was their

first word, and if left unheeded it was practically their last word also. In New Testament times when John the Baptist came to prepare the way of the Lord, he preached saying, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." The first report also of our Lord's work is, "Jesus preached, Repent ye and believe the Gospel." And when the disciples were sent forth on the first apostolic mission, "they went out and preached that men should repent."

The call to repentance has been, and must be, the method of preaching of all ages. We all accept it as a doctrine of religion, but the word, like all other words to express a great spiritual truth, is a wide word, capable of being very loosely used in many senses of varying degrees of meaning. It is sometimes used for regret or wishing that some act had been left undone, as in the old proverb about marrying in haste and repenting at leisure. It sometimes stands for remorse, which eats into the fibre of the life, ending in despair. Or in between these two extremes it may only mean a self-reproach for action now recognised to be foolish, or an impotent self-pity which rather enjoys the distinction of grief. It is not a fixed note as in a musical score, but runs up through the whole gamut from simple compunction up through many notes to contrition. The word is

wide, because life is wide; and the quality of the sorrow depends on the heart that sorrows, as the seed depends on the depth and richness, or the barrenness and poverty, of the soil in which it is cast. It is perhaps not necessary for us to be too precise in our theological thinking, and to attempt to define too minutely all that is contained in repentance at its best as the Schoolmen used to do; but it must be all for good to clarify our minds about a subject of such transcendent importance as repentance, and at least to see on what the emphasis ought to be laid.

The Schoolmen used to resolve repentance into three elements, all three necessary, the omission of any one of them destroying the worth of penitence—contrition, confession, satisfaction. Dante symbolises these three elements in the three steps which led up to the entrance-gate of Purgatory, where stood the Warder-angel with the drawn sword. As Purgatory is the place where the soul is to be shriven and cleansed, we see how appropriate it is that the three steps of repentance should be planted at the gate. When the Warder had invited them to enter and pass over the steps,

> Thither did we draw nigh, and that first stair
> Was of white marble, polished so and clean,
> It mirrored all my features as they were.
> The second darker than dusk perse was seen,

> Of stone all rugged, rough and coarse in grain,
> With many a crack its length and breadth between.
> The third, which o'er the others towers amain,
> Appeared as if of fiery porphyry,
> Like blood that gushes crimson from the vein.

The triple stair stands for the three steps of penitence—first, *contrition,* when a man sees himself as he really is, as Dante saw himself mirrored in the white marble. The second step is *confession,* which lays bare the heart black as the rugged stone, cracked and broken and coarse. The fiery porphyry stone is the third step, *satisfaction,* the love all afire to offer itself up, to atone even at the price of blood for the sake of the "blood of price" shed upon the cross.

In the Roman Catholic doctrine of penance errors crept in at the last two of these steps. Confession was defined as self-accusation to a priest, who possessed the power of the keys and was able to absolve from the sin. And when that was conceded, it was natural that satisfaction should become the tasks or penance imposed by the priest to satisfy justice. At the same time these three elements must be found in all true repentance. Each is to be found in the true evangelical state of repentance, and yet by itself each may be only a baleful delusion.

(1) Repentance implies contrition, sorrow and

shame for the past. When the heart awakes to the sense of sin, it is broken and torn with remorse and self-loathing. The whole literature of religion is full of this sorrow. We can hear to-day, after all the centuries, the sob and the wail in the Penitential Psalms. In all repentance there is this self-accusing pain, grief for a misspent past, an anguish of regret at the folly, something of the sense of guilt and self-loathing which made Job say, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Contrition is never absent from repentance, sorrow for sin; and yet sorrow is not repentance. To grieve is not necessarily to repent. There may be even a sense of guilt and a self-contempt without any sanctifying influence. Repentance implies sorrow, but sorrow is easier than repentance. The sorrow may maunder on in weak self-pity, a helpless regret that can neither forget the past nor redeem the future. The root of it may be only a fear of punishment, or a vague apprehension of danger; and if that fear were removed the life would bound back into the old careless security. There is no innate moral power in the sorrow. Repentance means that the moral springs of life and action are touched, purifying the motives, and driving the life into a new and higher sphere. Apart also from this danger of falling into a sort of luxury of self-pity

the sorrow may be remorse, a gnawing of despair. Remorse leads the life into a *cul-de-sac,* from which there is no way out either into peace or into amendment of life. Hopeless sorrow means moral paralysis, preventing the soul from reaping the fruits of true repentance.

(2) Again, as repentance implies contrition and yet sorrow is not repentance; so repentance implies confession and yet confession is not repentance. Confession of sin is the natural expression of the sense of sin. The truly penitent heart will be eager to unburden itself, to acknowledge the wrongdoing. Sorrow naturally finds issue in confession both to God and before men—especially before men who may have been wronged. Confession is before absolution: it is the way to forgiveness. "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord: and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." At the same time confession is not repentance. Like contrition, confession is easier than repentance. We only need to think of the common temptation to look upon a general confession of sinfulness as if it could take the place of particular and specific amendment. Men will confess to all the sins, before they will admit any faults, and while

they nod assent to being called sinners in the mass, they find it easy to make themselves out saints in detail. We never have public worship without confession of sin in some form or other; and yet we know the immense distinction between that and evangelical repentance. And we know that, however high we may scale the heights of Christian truth, we must ever and anon come back to the beginning as on that first apostolic missionary tour when they went out and preached that men should repent. The formal confession of imperfection and of having gone astray like lost sheep may never have stirred in us either the terror of sin or the passion of holiness. Repentance is not something to be gone through as a task like the formal repetition of a confession of sin. The fifty-first Psalm is not a cold admission of having erred and come short. It is an agony, a human soul at the bar of self-judgment and at the bar of God's judgment, crushed in the dust by the appalling consciousness of sin. Repentance and confession go together, but I do not need to labour the point further that they are by no means synonymous.

(3) The third element, and the third of Dante's triple stairs, is satisfaction, or better (to avoid the chance of error from the theological word) amend-

ment. This is the proof and fruit of repentance. It is the test of the genuineness of the sorrow for sin and of the confession. Repentance must work itself out in ethical life, in sincere endeavour after new obedience, if it is to possess any spiritual power—otherwise the contrition is only an emotion and the confession is only a form. This is the demand of religion. "Amend your ways and your doings" is Jeremiah's translation of the call to repentance. The saving grace displays itself not in impotent self-pity, nor in formal self-accusation, but in complete self-surrender of life. St. Paul summed up before Agrippa the burden of his message to the Gentiles, the essence of his preaching, "that they should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance." This third step of satisfaction is the crown and the necessary conclusion of the other two. "True repentance," says Jeremy Taylor, "must reduce to act all its holy purposes, and enter into and run through the state of holy living, which is contrary to that state of darkness in which in times past we walked." But here again, though this is true, yet amendment is not repentance. There may be outward reformation without any change of affections or will or heart. Repentance implies satisfaction, but satisfaction of a kind, or amendment,

is easier than repentance. There is an external conformity which apes the fruits of the Spirit, but with no heart in it, no love, no communion, no prayer, no vital faith, no deep religious life.

The truth is that each and all of these steps, contrition, confession, amendment, may be surface things, never really turning the heart from sin unto God. They are all concomitants of repentance, but there may be contrition even to bitter tears, confession of the most correct and exhaustive sort, amendment complete enough to merit the name of reformation, without the saving grace of repentance, without the true peace of forgiveness, and the sweet assurance of reconciliation with God. It is the old distinction of heart-religion and formal religion. The heart needs to be touched and moved and melted, bringing renewal of will and submission of life and new obedience, bringing every thought into captivity. Without that subtle element of reality the other three unimpeachable elements will not fuse and combine to make the perfect evangelical repentance. It alone can save from waste the three noble forms of penitence, and turn them into repentance tender and true and lasting, not to be repented of. It alone can transform these three steps, the white marble of self-knowledge and contrition, the dark rough

broken stone of confession for the dark and broken past, the fiery porphyry of satisfaction like blood that gushes crimson from the vein, and make them not the entrance merely to a Purgatory the long shriving of the soul, but the entrance direct and immediate into life eternal, the gateway into Paradise the presence of the living God.

How are we to stimulate conscience? Not the mere preaching of the necessity of repentance will avail much. It is an old story, an accepted commonplace, that men should repent. We must bring men before Christ, before His teaching and life. To preach Christ is to convince men of failure and convict them of sin. The grace and truth of His lips, the love and holiness of His life, cannot be presented to us fairly without our feeling and saying with Peter, "I am a sinful man." The appeal Christ makes to us for God brings to us conviction of sin as no elaborate explanation of our participation in the sin of Adam can do. Men can put it away from them, but they know as they make the great refusal that it is *sin*—and the murder is out. It is not the mere preaching of need by itself, but the preaching of the Gospel that produces repentance. St. Paul's appeal to the Jews after his terrible exposure of the failure of the Gentiles is, "Despisest thou the

riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" To show men God's goodness ought to lead them to repentance instead of making them proud and hard and self-satisfied. That He should act on our hearts when He might work on our conscience, that He should appeal to us by love when He might appeal to us by fear. To a right-thinking man is there anything which sends him to his knees like the thought of God's goodness and forbearance and long-suffering? There is no topic so rich for thoughts of humility and penitence and tenderness of heart as the topic of God's patience with us.

What can plough the heart, so that contrition becomes grief and hatred of sin, and vitalise confession till it becomes the uncovering of soul to God, and inspire satisfaction that moves with haste and joy to the will of God? Here we are at the very root of evangelic religion. It is not the price of blood which we must pay, but the blood of price which has been paid. There is nothing which so moves the conscience and leads to repentance like the preaching of Christ crucified. The Cross which heals us wounds us. It is the apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, as the *Westminster Shorter*

Catechism puts it, which induces true grief and hatred of sin, and impels to full purpose of and endeavour after new obedience. Nothing will break down the barriers of self-will and melt the stubborn heart and leave the whole soul soft to the touch of the creative God but the spectacle of His deathless love. When we apprehend the mercy of God in Christ, we are pierced to the quick, and know full well that men should repent.

X

THE PENALTY OF HATE

Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.—ESTHER v. 13.

THERE are spots in the sun; and if you think you see the spots, you will come to see nothing but the spots when you look. There is some drawback in the fairest prospect, and when the eye once catches it there is no getting rid of it—we come back to it again and again to be irritated afresh. There is some discord in the harmony, and we harp on it till the whole music is spoiled to us. A blot on the page expands till there seems no inch that is free of it. There is something to haggle about in the best bargain, something that would just make it perfect if only that could have been thrown in. How hard it is to make a man permanently happy! He can often be made happy easily enough, if only he would remain happy. Can you make a man happy by giving him things, the things he wants and loves? I suppose you can, at least up to a point. The grati-

fication of desire, of taste, of ambition would bring sense of satisfaction which we would call happiness. But so contrary is human nature, there is always something else needed for the perfect state, something that would make the cup run over, a further step in the ladder of promotion, one other dignity, an extra possession or pleasure. There is a black spot in the sunshine.

The story of Haman was one of immense and rapid success. He had climbed high, till he was the greatest man in the Persian Empire next to the king. Every day brought him some new token of his power; every day gave him a new evidence of royal favour. It was the breath of his nostrils. He lived on it, and he had plenty to live on. He could boast of how he had been advanced above all the princes and servants of the king. But his pride had been wounded by the neglect of a certain Jew named Mordecai to bow before him and do him reverence. He could easily have crushed the insolent Jew with one word, but the insult had so mortified his pride that he could not be content with merely punishing the culprit. The royal favourite aimed at a royal revenge. He would make the whole race, to which this impudent dog Mordecai belonged, suffer for it. Through his court influence he laid the train for this

revenge. He had only to wait a few more days for it, and meanwhile he was having new favours showered upon him, but everything was poisoned to him by the sight of Mordecai unhanged. He could only appease his fretful irritation and revengeful pride by superintending the erection of a high gallows. Mordecai was the black spot in his sunshine.

He had had one other signal token of his greatness. He, and he alone of all men, had been invited with the king to Queen Esther's banquet; and how his courtier's eyes gleamed. He came home with singing heart and dancing feet from the palace to tell the great news to his friends; but there at the gate of the palace was Mordecai—and the black bile again clouded his sight. It was not only when he came out of the palace and saw the patient Jew sitting at the gate that Haman choked with anger and bitter feeling. It went home with him and stayed with him. It was a death's head at the very feast when pride was most gratified. Mordecai sat on him like the old man of the sea, and wriggle as he might he could not free himself. The vision of the hated Jew was not only at the palace gate, but in his very heart. It was like a mote in the eye; and look where he would

the mote was there. Mordecai blotted out the sun from the heavens to Haman.

He gathered his wife and his friends together to rejoice with him in his joy, and told them of the glory of his riches, of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him and how he had advanced him above the princes. And the best was yet to come, "Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to-morrow am I invited unto her also with the king." Could not such a man be happy with such a fortune? There is a dead fly in the sweet ointment. All the splendour of court favour, the sunshine of the king's smile which does so much for courtiers, could not take away the sting of the tacit insult that Mordecai had not bowed to the great man and done him reverence. It took all the sap out of his pleasure, a gnat's bite that chased away all his comfort. He had more than enough to make him happy according to his own scale of happiness, and he might have waived this little thing aside as of no account compared to his genuine success, a mole-hill set beside a mountain. But the size and importance of a mole-hill depends on its situation. It was too near him; he carried

it about with him and could never see past it. It dwarfed the very mountain. All this availeth me nothing so long as I see this.

Do we know enough of our own hearts to be able to make any modern interpretation and any personal application of the story? Is there no wounded pride, which can be as bitter as Haman's though not on so large a scale? Is there no hatred, with or without reason, which can make a man see red everywhere, with blood in the eyes from the hot heart within? Is there no malice that cannot rest even in personal triumphs and successes, because there is some Mordecai sitting at the gate? Is there no envy that gives the jaundiced eye turning the sunshine into black spots? Is there no jealousy which can make a man forget all his blessings and count them as nothing before the one thing lacking? Is there no revenge that keeps its own wounds green by harbouring the vengeful thoughts? There is room for many a sermon of quite modern application from Haman's tragic confession that his hatred spoiled everything to him. "All this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the gate."

Some one offended us, wittingly or unwittingly.

For good cause or no cause, we took a dislike to some one. Some one does not show us sufficient honour or reverence. We heard that he said something critical or cutting, and we never took into consideration that the repeated saying may have been twisted in the carrying, if indeed it was not a lie outright. Or we have let envy of some one gradually eat into our mind, and we can hardly keep him out of our thoughts and out of our conversation, like King Charles's head in poor mad Dick's petitions in *David Copperfield*. Whatever be the cause, right or wrong, that makes us dislike or seek to injure by act or speech, this at least is a law that any sort of hatred indulged edges its way to a foremost place in the mind, grows more and more insistent till it colours everything and spoils everything, till we know something of the feeling which prompted the words, "All this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew there." It leaves its trail over the whole life. Poor wretched Haman hurt himself by his hatred more than he possibly could hurt Mordecai. He carried about with him a serpent that gnawed at his own vitals.

(1) Thus, notice for our own learning that malice makes a man lose perspective. It magnifies

the one petty thing and blinds the eyes to everything else. This little speck assumes gigantic dimensions till in imagination it overshadows all other subjects. It is like the lust of curiosity, which makes the whole wide world open to inspection as of no account compared to the one hidden thing, as in the Bluebeard type of story familiar from nursery days, in which every room of the spacious house is open, but there is one locked door and nothing but that counts. It poisoned Paradise to Eve that, though of every tree of the Garden they could freely eat, there was one tree forbidden. She disparages all the rest, dwells on the single prohibition, amplifies it in imagination, magnifies it till Eden itself seems to consist of one tree only. In the same way this other lust of Haman's destroys true perspective. Mordecai's petty affront loomed larger in his mind than all his dignities and successes and pleasures. He had no comfort in his success, his thriving family, his riches, his advancement at court, the very things he loved most. This insult to his pride was as a speck of foreign matter in healthy tissue spreading irritation and inflammation, till his mind was aflame. Even when he boasts of all his greatness and plumes himself among his friends who

soothe him with the flattery he covets, he must add with a groan, "Yet all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." His pride and malice and envy made him a self-tormentor, and nothing could abate the fever. Hatred always makes a man lose the perspective of life, even the right perspective of his own blessings. It keeps the wounds green, so that they cannot heal, and nothing really matters but that one spot of disease. Disease it is, want of ease, a perturbation of the normal functions of life. Hate infallibly brings disease, discomfort. There is no peace, no ease, no happiness that way.

(2) Further, notice how it leads to self-deception even in the things where a wily, worldly man like Haman would be supposed to be wide-awake. He was a master of intrigue, and knew the ropes of the court, as we say. Yet his vanity and malice made him a child, nay a fool. He thought he was high in the queen's graces, a prime favourite, because she invited him to the banquet; and such a clever man would have found out the real reason if his brain were not clouded by vanity. If he had not scorned and hated Mordecai so much, he would have found out something more about him, and

would have found out that the queen's favour was his ruin and not his promotion. Self-deceived, the gallows he prepared for his enemy was destined for his own carcass. He fell into the pit he digged for another, as many a scheming, malicious man has done before and since. His hatred stole away his brain; and truly did he say that all he had availed him nothing so long as he was inflamed with hatred. Seneca's word has had many an illustration in history and experience, "Anger is like rain; it breaks itself on what it falls." The self-deception leads to self-destruction. From any and every point of view this state of mind in which Haman was spells failure. It destroys all peace and happiness; it changes the true perspective of things; it clouds the intellect; and it ruins the soul.

What can save us from it, guard us from giving way to it, rescue us from its deadly grip if it already has hold of us? No mere negative precaution can avail much. It would not have been enough, though it would have been something, for Haman to pretend that he did not see his enemy at the gate, to pass him by in contempt and try to forget his existence. He could not really forget

—that was his hell. He was hag-ridden by the thought of him. It cannot be done by the curb merely, by keeping down the subject and shutting out the sight. Envy and hate and malice of all sorts are not to be disposed of by argument and repression. They can only be swept out of the heart by love.

Take a common illustration of the human frailty. Some one in your own business or profession tempts your spite. It may be by his success, his popularity, his gifts that perhaps you think meretricious. The only possible way for you to evict your feeling is to see the good in him, and value it at its highest. All the jealousies in art and literature, and they are perhaps worse there than in any other lines of life, can alone be disposed of thus. The only way to do with excellence of any kind is to love it, be glad and proud of it, appropriate it as if it were part of your own possession, *as it is* if you do this. If Haman had seen the pathos of Mordecai's position and loved him, whether the Jew responded or not, whether he had bowed to him and done him reverence or not, the mischief that spoiled Haman's peace and lost him his life would have been averted; and the chances are that he would have won over his

enemy till he would have been glad to show him honour. In any case he would never have had to confess that the black trail of his hate was over his whole life, and that all availed nothing so long as this wretched Jew remained unhanged. Hate makes a circle of contagion and infects everything; and love too makes a blessed circle till we see nothing but love, think nothing but love, feel nothing but love.

Where is the mystic centre of that circle of light? At the centre of that circle, whose circumference is the whole universe of God, there stands a Cross. It is the place of pity, the place of tears, the place of prayer. Love there is lifted up gleaming with divine radiance, and Golgotha the place of skulls is a garden of souls. At the Cross we bow in penitence of self and pity of others. We cannot keep our malice there. The blood of the Cross washes our hearts clean of every speck of hate. The message of the Cross for every human life is the service of love. It gives the querulous sentence a new turn, filling it with another sort of passion, the passion of the Christ who came to seek and to save, so that all we have availeth nothing so long as one lonely soul sits out-

side the King's house, outside the Father's love. Hold Thou Thy Cross before mine eyes, O Christ, that I may see what life is and what death is, what man is and what God is, because what Love is.

XI

THE LAW OF ENVIRONMENT

Shun profane babblings: for they will proceed further in ungodliness, and their word will eat (or spread) as doth a gangrene.—2 Timothy ii. 17 (R. V.).

This Epistle is a personal one, full therefore of personal references, and full of loving exhortation and instruction. It is written to a pastor placed in a difficult situation, with many problems to solve, and indeed with the whole faith of his church menaced by a great danger. The danger is what ultimately grew into the powerful Gnostic heresy of the second century. Here, as in all the pastoral Epistles, there are indications that the Apostle appreciated the danger. At this stage there seem to have been only symptoms of the false doctrines, and not a full-blown system such as it afterwards became. So the references are vague, and consist mostly of warnings against the beginnings of the spirit which would produce the heresy. It is seen rather as a tendency than as a well-formulated

system. The heresy is not combated as a distinct creed with clearly-marked propositions, though references are made to a theory of religion, which made faith consist of grandiose speculations and which also made morality consist of ascetic life.

I do not propose to show at present the points of contact between the false doctrines referred to in these Epistles and the Gnostic heresy which afterwards afflicted the Church. Our subject suggested by the text is the deep social and religious truth of the influence of environment. The Apostle warns Timothy that such idle and unchristian speculations are as a disease that will destroy both true faith and true morality. Many of the false opinions of this heresy at first seem to be at the worst only harmless speculation, not really affecting life. It appears as if a man might hold them and be none the worse for it. For example, a man might believe that the resurrection is past already, and it might be looked on as an eccentricity of opinion merely, or he might believe that matter is essentially evil without his opinion on that subject affecting himself, and so on with the other tenets referred to in these Epistles. It is a common enough position among us that faith is nothing compared to conduct, and that the two are not much connected. It is con-

stantly said that creed is only a sort of pious opinion, and that it is of very little account what a man believes. This is a very shallow statement, though it is very natural to say that it does not matter what theories a man accepts, if only his conduct is correct.

The Apostle holds the precisely opposite view, and asserts that the two sides of life cannot be divided up in this way, as if thought and action, creed and life, could remain unrelated. His point is that the one inevitably affects the other, acts on it, and is acted on by it in return. Men cannot accept false theories without being the worse for it morally. These profane babblings and vain speculations, which we might pass by as of little moment, will, he declares, increase unto more ungodliness, and their word will spread as doth a gangrene. Creed translates itself into conduct if it be real belief. Theories influence life, if they be really accepted.

St. Paul in the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians combated this same shallow view. Some of his converts there seemingly thought that they might hold some speculative opinions which were not in strict consistence with the Christian faith, and that they would not be any the worse morally and spiritually. They might deny the doctrine of

immortality, for example, and not do any special damage to the rest of faith and life. St. Paul assured them that life was all of a piece, and that they could not keep their creed from affecting their conduct, and showed them how easily their denial of immortality could slip into a lax Epicurean life which took as its motto, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." St. Paul's judgment is truer to history and to human nature. False opinions cannot be kept in an air-tight compartment, so that they will not disturb the rest of life. The whole quality of the mind is affected. If nothing else, they may at any moment distort the whole vision. Be not deceived, is his solemn warning, evil intercourse of any sort corrupts good morals. It is surely the shallowest of all ideas that false opinions and loose views of life and sceptical theories do not count for much, and can be conjoined with a high moral tone and a stainless life. That might be if these speculations are more or less of an affectation, put on on the outside merely, though even then, like all affectation, they would affect the life with a certain falseness.

There are of course opinions which do not enter into the fibre of the mind and have no hold on the heart, which are more a profession than a creed,

and in that case they may have little practical effect; but that is because they are not the actual opinions and real beliefs. Instead of a man's faith not counting much, nothing else really counts. What a man's faith is, he is. Conduct in the long run is just creed expressing itself. It is because this is so that the principle is absolutely true that by its fruits is a tree to be judged. Alongside of the shallow thought we have been noticing, the Apostle's warning is profoundly true, insisting that the two sides of our nature are inextricably bound together; "Shun profane babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness, and their word will spread as doth a gangrene." It will be, says the Apostle, like a spot of death on the living flesh of the Church that will eat into the tissues and spread till the whole suffers putrefaction. The evil creed with its lowering of moral life will affect the whole body and scatter mortification through the whole radius of the Church. The disease will eat and spread as doth a gangrene.

I have said that this principle suggested in the text is part of the law of environment. Timothy is asked to shun, and to do what he can to make others shun, the evil doctrine and ungodly life of their environment, which have crept into the

Church also. It is because the Apostle realises the tremendous power of environment that he warns with such impressive solemnity. He knew that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. We usually take an outside and surface view of what environment means. We think of it as our outward surroundings, conditions of work and conditions of home life. We think of it largely as a physical question, and imagine that if we could but improve the material lot of people, if we could sweeten and improve the conditions of living, then we would avert all the possible evil of the law of environment. There is very much in this aspect, and we should encourage every effort towards the amelioration of the surroundings of life. But the law of environment is a far subtler thing than all that, and cuts much deeper into our lives. After all is said about material conditions, it has to be remembered that the chief environment of a human life does not consist of things but of *persons*. There is a moral and spiritual climate as well as a physical. Why are the conditions of work and conditions of houses and streets and civic arrangements so important? It is because they represent the subtler personal factor. They are powerful agents in influencing habits and affecting character,

just because they are impregnated with the lives of others. The people make the homes and the workshops and the towns, which have such influence over our lives. The beginning and the middle and the end of all influence is really personal, if we probe deep enough into its seat.

When we think of it, we see that all the permanent influences of life come from persons. Home is not the walls where furniture is stored, but the place where others exercise their weird influence over us. If you analyse the conditions of your work which you feel to have a great effect on your life, you will find that the effect is produced not so much by the mere work itself, as by the relations it brings you into with other men, the influence of your fellow-workmen and those with whom you associate. And so with every other sphere of life. The real environment, the mighty forces that play upon life and mould character, are thus spiritual; and this is where we have power over our environment. We can submit to what is evil in that environment, or we can shun it. We can open mind and heart to it, or we can shut the door against it. We can to some extent select the forces that act upon us. If we wilfully submit ourselves to the influence of the lower, if we

choose to associate with what impoverishes true life, if we let evil intercourse do its corrupting work on us, it will pervade and pollute all life. This is the law of spiritual environment suggested in the warning of our text, "Shun profane babblings, for they will increase unto more ungodliness, and their word will eat like a gangrene."

We have seen the truth of this in the mental sphere: how much more true and powerful is it in the moral sphere! If we think we can play with evil influences, enter their company when it suits us and leave it as we entered; if we think we can read defiling literature and be none the worse for it, that we can tamper with doubtful courses and keep our real life unspotted, that we can be one of evil company and yet not become as it is, we are deceiving ourselves. The law of spiritual environment acts unerringly and unfailingly. The gangrene of evil eats into the very tissue of the body and the fabric of the mind. It blunts the conscience, and lowers the standard of the whole life.

When we think of the tremendous force of this law of environment we may well wonder that we enter into relationships so casually and so carelessly. A young man chooses his friendships by haphazard. Indeed, often he does not choose them

at all, but lets himself drift into them. Their opinions and standards of thinking and practice gradually become his; and yet as a rule how much or how little thought does he give to this subject? In all human intercourse influence permeates ceaselessly the whole circle from centre to circumference —your influence on others, their influence on you. It is not a plea for a hermit life, but a plea for serious consideration of the conditions of social life. The consideration should be twofold, the sense of your duty towards others, the sense of a necessary duty towards yourself in this matter. See to it that your influence in all your companionships and in all your associations is for good: and see to it that you do not submit your life to the degradation and contamination of evil relationships. The moral environment acts insistently and remorselessly. The books you read, the friendships you form, the opinions you hold, the faith you profess—these affect your mind and motives and ambitions, and so change your conduct, and influence your life, and settle your destiny. It has the certainty of fact; for it is the statement of law. Shun the profane in thought and imagination, in speech and action, in all relations of life; for it will proceed further in ungodliness, and will spread as doth a gangrene,

Thus in every true life there is need of some protest. A man is known by what he shuns as easily as by what he accepts; he is known by the things he will not do, by the company he will not keep. There are always things which an enlightened conscience will not tolerate, against which it protests, and from which it dissents. What is it in your environment which represents your temptation, the influence which finds the weak spot so easily? Shun it. Turn deaf ears to its seductions. Look not on it. Touch it not. Shake yourself free from it at all costs. There is no peace except through the fight. There is a kind of peace to be got through surrender, but the true peace is the peace of victory. Will you let your life be corrupted by weak compliance with what is evil and profane, till it lays hold of every sacred instinct, and degrades every high thought and every noble passion? Here is the principle of all noble choice: whatever dishonours Christ, whatever hurts your own spiritual life and keeps you from being your best, whatever spoils your influence for good over others, that you must renounce and resolutely shun; for it will proceed further in ungodliness and eat as doth a gangrene.

XII

REVERSAL OF JUDGMENT

But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.
—St. Matthew xix. 30.

The rich young ruler who had come to Jesus so hopefully had gone away sorrowfully. The terms of discipleship were too high for him. With his blameless life behind him, and his present noble aspirations, he had great possessions, and his heart shrunk from the sacrifice which our Lord demanded. Between the horns of the dilemma, of giving up power and position on the one hand, and on the other of forfeiting the new spiritual life which was dawning for him, he wavered irresolutely and fell back on the lower plane, making the great refusal. Naturally the Master turned to His disciples, with the keen regret which such an incident brought, and spoke of the hindrance to the divine life which wealth was to a man. His speech took on an earnest, almost severe tone, as He thought of how souls were clogged and imprisoned by worldly things; and the disciples were awed by the austerity of His words.

But that mood soon passed to self-complacency, as Peter became their spokesman, and recalled how they at least had left all and followed Him. They had done what the young ruler found too hard. They had not so much to give up, but it was their all; what would be their recompense? How patient the Master was with His disciples, with their failure to rise to His teaching, their lack of understanding, their unspiritual outlook! How patient He still is with our crassness and want of insight! He answered Peter with loving encouragement, that they would indeed be rewarded for every sacrifice. Not for nothing did they leave all and follow Him. Not for nothing does a man serve God. Not for nothing does he turn his face from earthly things to the glorious vision, and choose the beauty of holiness to any worldly good. But, knowing the self-complacency which prompted the question, our Lord adds a warning to His encouragement. It is true that they had responded at once to the call; true that they are privileged as the first disciples of the Kingdom; "but," He adds with solemn warning, "many that are first shall be last, and the last first."

It is a saying to make us pause, full of deep suggestiveness, applicable to many spheres of life and religion. It should lead to self-scrutiny to be thus

told authoritatively that in the spiritual world there will be a complete reversal of human judgment, such moral surprises as that the first and the last should change places. How true it is we sometimes see even here, true of men, and nations, and Churches. Innumerable are the illustrations of how God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty. It is a commonplace of history and experience. The old fable of the hare and the tortoise is acknowledged by men to represent a fact of life. The clever boy at school to whom everything came easy is tempted to become slipshod and casual in his work, and to become complacent in his estimates of self, and sometimes to develop even more serious moral faults which in the long run, in spite of his brilliant start, leave him hopelessly behind in the race: and the dull boy, slow in understanding, to whom most things are at first difficult, may grow into a strong man, virile in intellect, with mastery over his life because with faculties made keen by constant effort. Great movements started with the blare of trumpets have ended in smoke; while small beginnings have led to mighty results. The fable of the hare and the tortoise is only a parable of life. Again and again has first in time been last in reaching the goal; first in privi-

lege been last in achievement; first in position been last in permanent power. Instances lie sprinkled on every page of history, and stare us in the face at every step on the road of life. The stone rejected of the builders has become the chief corner-stone. God has put down the mighty from their seat and exalted them of low degree. Nations that seemed to stand strong and four-square have tumbled like a house of cards; and the obscure and feeble people has grown into a world-empire. A little one has become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation.

> A falcon, towering in her pride of place,
> Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and killed.

And if this is so even in such palpable instances, how much truer is it in the things of the spirit, in the Kingdom of Heaven which cometh not with observation. If the first can be last, and the last first, in the ultimate judgment of man, what can we say about the judgment of God which is unerring, and which can never be deceived by appearances? The spiritual world is a *secret* world. There an act is judged not by its size, not even by its good result, but by its motive alone; and a man is judged not by the place he fills in men's mind, not by the splash he makes in the world, but by his spirit alone. Life

may have departed, though the house of life stand fair and strong to the eyes of men. In the things of the spirit who knows what is going on beneath the surface? The deepest temptations, those which test the very foundation of life, are the hidden ones, the secret ordeal, the battlefield of which is the heart. The spiritual result of a trial, a grief, a temptation, who can estimate in the case of each? To one it may be a savour of life unto life; to another a savour of death unto death. Thus that which is first to all appearance, may be last in reality.

On the other hand, a commanding character and a wealth of goodness may be in process of being built up in unlikely men, in those who look to be last, in lives that are unnoticed, unheralded, unsung, with no brilliance or show about them. There is no sphere like the religious where the fallacy of results is so preposterous. Growth is ever secret, with no sound of mechanism: it goes on with noiseless changes in the laboratory of nature. And the seed in the heart of man partakes of the same secrecy. Till one day the harvest! Of what? Only God knows. All that we know is that necessarily there must be a complete subversion of human standards, and falsifying of human judgments. There will be many surprises, as complete as the words of our text

prefigure. It is not that hypocrisy will be unmasked. We always overestimate the amount of conscious hypocrisy in the world. Rather it will be found that the things we count first are really last. Character will be stripped bare, and only moral worth will remain. The things we thought goodness, the things which deceived us, which we looked on as of first importance, will be seen as they are. So that many that are first are last, and many that are last are first.

Even now, though often late, justice is done, and contemporary judgment is reversed, and we can see the truth of our text. Among the Apostles themselves, Peter and the others were first in time, and Paul was indeed born out of due time, but we know who was most used for the building up of the Church. The Jews were first in privilege, but the Gentiles laid hold of eternal life, and the favoured people were left a broken branch on the tree. And in the Christian Church again and again it has been not the mighty, the noble, the wise, those patently first to the eye, who have been called to high service, but the poor and the weak, and the foolish; and the last has been first. The warning of the text to Peter and his fellow-disciples is that they who are first in their zeal and sacrifice, who have forsaken all

to follow Him, may yet be last in the true quality of their service. It may be all vitiated by unworthy motive.

We can see a little of the moral reason for the reversal of our ordinary judgments. One thing is that men who feel themselves secure in their foremost place easily become self-complacent, and sit at ease in Zion. Sydney Smith, I think it was, who speaking about Established Churches put one of the objections to them in the witty saying, that endowed cats catch no mice. Whether true of the particular case or not, we understand the temptation involved to all who are looked on as first in the Church. They are ever in danger of settling down in weak self-satisfaction, and assuming that their high place in the esteem of men corresponds to their true inward merit.

Then again, we find it difficult to confine our attention to actual goodness, when we call some men first, and put others last. In the Church, as in all other institutions, the leaders are the men of great gifts, of eloquence, of intellectual grasp, of scholarly attainments, of consuming zeal for religion, or some other outstanding gift. But none of these, nor all of these, represent *the* principle of judgment which must test religious men. None of these is

in itself goodness, though they can direct and enforce the qualities which are essential. Thus with the great religious figures—the world, and the Church, and they themselves may be deceived. There may be eloquence, and mystical insight, and zeal, and masterly intellect (any, or all of these), when the motives are corrupted, and the spirit is alien to the Spirit of Christ. Deep down, buried out of sight, may be the master-passion which sways the life, the basal motive on which the character is built. Men may make daily sacrifices for the Kingdom of God, may be lavish of their time and their means, may even suffer for their faith, may stand first for their abundant labours; and yet before the great Searcher of hearts may be last.

We can see how easy it is for us to go wrong in our judgments. Suppose a man such as St. Paul pictures, with gifts mental and spiritual so exalted that he could speak to the Church with the tongues of men and of angels, so deep of nature that he could understand all mysteries and knowledge, so full of faith that he could remove mountains, so charitable that he bestowed all his goods to feed the poor, so zealous that he was ready to give his body to be burned for the Church's sake; would we, the Church, put such a man down as nothing, as sounding

brass and a clanging cymbal? Would we not set him in front to be admired and followed? Would we not hail him as first in our midst, and be proud to have him as leader? Yet St. Paul declares that if the spirit of love were wanting, he the first in human estimation is in God's standard last.

So the words come to us, as they came to Peter, with solemn warning, that we may not deceive ourselves. We must not judge either ourselves or others according to rank, or position, or ability, or zeal, or honour in the Church, or any outward quality. There is another judgment, according to intrinsic spiritual worth, and that will be the final judgment of all. Our present estimates of life and character are provisional. All earthly judgments must be ratified or reversed at the great tribunal. There is therefore no room for censoriousness and harsh judgment of our fellows, when we may be so easily deceived. It is a call to us for truer self-scrutiny, to ask ourselves whether we have been deceiving ourselves, whether our place in the estimation of men is our place in the esteem of God. It is a question which might be put to the national conscience, that we may beware lest we who have been so favoured of God, and set as a city on a hill, who have been given power and authority, are

walking worthy of our great vocation. We may ask it as a Church prospered by the favour of the Church's Head, blessed in countless ways, whether our heart is still sound. It is a lesson of humility in every case.

Above all, let us ask the question of ourselves as individuals. Our virtues and graces, the things that people admire in us, or that we admire in ourselves, may be only tending to our deterioration, if we have lost sight of the essential thing, if our hearts are not pure from the taint of self. With all our privilege, with all that we call our blessings, with all our knowledge, with all the gifts that we imagine give us a foremost place in the Kingdom of God's grace, we may be only slipping down in the scale of being; and if we are to be saved it can only be as by fire. The more we are blessed by God to do anything for Him, the more is there need of prayer and watching, lest that by any means, when we have preached to others, we ourselves should be reprobate.

But there is more than warning in these deep words. There is also a message of hope to all who feel themselves last, the despondent, all who think themselves overmatched in the warfare of life, and outrun in the race of life. If part of the Church's

canonisation is unsound, let us remember also that the Saints are not all in the Canon. Christ's little ones, the nameless, fameless Saints, the humble believers, who live their sweet, helpful, loving lives, may take courage that however overlooked by the world they are regarded in Heaven, however misunderstood by men they are understood by God. What He asks from all, the high and the low, the first and the last, is a sincere heart in which burns the pure flame of love. Whatever be our scale of earthly precedence, though it be reckoned last in our purblind judgment, that is first—so far first that it has no second.

XIII

THE COURAGE OF CONSECRATION

And I said, should such a man as I flee?—Nehemiah vi. 11.

The memoirs of Nehemiah present to us a record of noble endeavour, and show us what can be achieved by one man of courage and faith, whose life is ruled by unswerving allegiance to duty. They reveal Nehemiah as a man of deep feeling and tireless energy and stern resolution. He has his place in the history of revelation, not because of any profound thought on the problems of life, nor because of new insight into truth, but because of what he was enabled to do at a critical period of Israel's history. He was not a prophet who saw visions, nor a poet who interpreted the heart of man. He has no place in the long line of thinkers who have opened up new regions for the human spirit. He was rather a man of affairs, keen, practical, with genius for organisation, a born leader of men, a man of iron nerve and passionate energy. He was the typical statesman in a day of small things,

rather than the typical prophet like Isaiah, who was a statesman also, but with larger vision and dealing with wider interests. He was a practical business man throwing his great capacities into work for the good of his nation.

In a time like ours, when such qualities stand so high in public estimation, and among a people like us more noted for energy than for thought, for business than for vision, it is encouraging to note how similar capacities were in Nehemiah's case used for the Kingdom of Heaven. All the powers that dwell within a man can find ample scope, if they be only set to noble ends. Nothing is common and unclean among man's gifts if it be but consecrated. The Church will not take her rightful place and perform her perfect work, until she can command these qualities so common in our midst, until men realise that they are called to give of all they have to her service. Enthusiasm for social progress, business talent, power of organisation, capacity to deal with practical affairs, even financial genius, all those very attributes most highly developed to-day, should be offered in greater degree than they are. Men who possess them are as much bound to devote them to larger ends than merely selfish ones, as men endowed with the rarer gifts of

brain and heart. This is surely one great lesson from the life of Nehemiah. But for the consecration of these very gifts he would have been nothing but a successful man of affairs, or a high-placed permanent official, or a skilful counsellor at the Persian court. Because in the power of a simple faith he gave himself to a great work, he stands in the succession of prophets and psalmists and saints and apostles, having spent himself for the Kingdom of God. Can any personal success compare with taking a share in the coming of the Kingdom? We need a higher conception of service, the consecration of all gifts to the service of God and men. Without this it will be to find at the last that you have spent your strength for nought and have given your labour for vanity.

Another lesson from Nehemiah's example is the lesson of courage that will not be daunted by difficulties, resolution to adhere to the path of duty, let come what may. The incident to which our text refers is an illustration of this. The task to which Nehemiah set himself was one, he soon discovered, which demanded all his energy and perseverance. Surrounded by the hostility of implacable foes of Jerusalem, who would stick at no treachery to prevent the fulfilment of his purposes, he had to fan

the flickering flame of patriotism within his own countrymen. The enmity outside was no greater than the feebleness and cowardice within. A less stout-hearted man would have given up in despair, when he learned to what lengths of treachery his opponents were prepared to go. Cajolements, threats, charges of conspiracy against the King of Persia, open violence and covert attack, were all hurled at him, and all failed to make him even stop the work for a moment. He only said, "O God, strengthen my hands," as he drove on with his great task of building the walls of the city and securing it against attack.

Even the word of a prophet was perverted to force him to desist. Shemaiah pretended to reveal a plot formed against him, and as if in terror for him and for himself, besought him to take refuge in the Temple. "Let us go together to the house of God within the Temple; for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee." It was a mean plan to compass Nehemiah's ruin in another way—to make him ruin himself. It was the height of impiety for a man who was not a priest to trespass in the Temple; and for the governor to do this to save his life would have alienated from him the sympathy of all the best people in the city,

all the pious Jews who were his chief supporters. Shemaiah's veiled argument is that the safety of such an important life as that of the governor was of more value than the punctilious keeping of a Temple law.

The force of the temptation to a religious man like Nehemiah was that the advice came to him through the mouth of a prophet. It seemed as if God commanded him to follow it. But he judged the counsel by his own moral sense and perceived that it was false; for God could not ask him at once to neglect his plain duty and at the same time commit a sin against the ceremonial law. He saw that the prophet was hired by his enemies to frighten him and compel him to do what would be accounted a sin, and thus have matter for an evil report to undermine his influence and achieve their own base designs. His answer was in keeping with his own resolute life. "Should such a man as I flee? Who is there that being such as I would go into the Temple to save his life? I will not go in." If need be he would die at his post. Not even to escape assassination could he, the leader of the great enterprise, show the white feather. The place of duty might be a place of danger, but he dare not flinch from it on that account. Humanly speaking,

everything depended on him; and for him to weaken and desert even to save his life would be to ruin the cause. Instead of the fact of his being governor being an excuse for considering his own safety, it was the very opposite. Just because he was in a position of responsibility with every eye on him, and because there lay on him a heavy burden of duty, he must be true even though it should mean death. "Should such a man as I flee?"

The courage which Nehemiah displayed was the courage of faith. He felt himself called to do this work, and he would do it at any cost. He believed that God was with him, and he was not going to turn tail and flee at the first sign of danger. There is a courage which is common enough, the courage of hot blood, which is a sort of animal instinct. It seems even constitutional in some races. This physical courage is only what we expect in men of our breed, an inheritance from our ancestors. We so seldom see past the surface that we often mistake the very qualities which compose the highest kind of courage. We praise a man because we say he does not know fear; but this may be mere insensibility. Some courage is due to want of thought, or want of imagination, or want of care for others. It may be only a dare-devil recklessness. But true courage

needs to have something more in it than this quality of hot blood. Dumas in his great character of D'Artagnan, whom he meant to be the typical brave soldier, gives a touch which shows how real courage implies sensitive feeling mastered by a strong will. "D'Artagnan, thanks to his ever-active imagination, was afraid of a shadow; and ashamed of being afraid, he marched straight up to that shadow, and then became extravagant in his bravery if the danger proved to be real." Even physical courage is not simply absence of fear, not simply thoughtless, heedless daring. It needs to be related to a moral quality before it can take any high place as a virtue.

This true courage is rather steadfastness of mind, the calm, resolute fixity of purpose which holds to duty in the scorn of consequence. Nehemiah displayed this kind of courage when, alive to the presence of danger, knowing well the risk and counting all the cost, he turned upon the tempter with the indignant question, "Should such a man as I flee?" He stood in the path of duty, and therefore in the very line of God's will, and he would not budge one inch. Luther showed the same courage when the Elector wrote to him before the Diet of Worms reminding him that John Huss had been burnt at the Council

of Constance, although he also possessed a safe-conduct. Luther replied that he would go to Worms if there were as many devils there as tiles on the roofs. He knew well that the chances were that he was going to his death; but he also knew that he was obeying conscience and obeying the truth by going. To his dear friend Melanchthon, who was in distress at their parting, he said, "My dear brother, if I do not come back, if my enemies put me to death, you will go on teaching and standing fast in the truth: if *you* live, *my* death will matter little." He too, like Nehemiah, was sustained by the thought of duty, by the sense of responsibility as the leader of a great movement, and by a resolute faith in God. "Should such a man as I flee?"

There is no quality more necessary for noble living than this moral courage; and there is no quality the lack of which is responsible for more failures. Courage of a sort is common enough, but this courage is rare, this steadfastness of heart, this unmovable adherence to duty, which turns an obstinate face to temptation, whether it come in the form of allurement or in the form of threat. Yet without it a strong character cannot possibly be formed. What examples we are of weakness of will, infirmity of purpose, instability of life, indecision of character.

We need more iron in our blood. We need to have our natures hardened to withstand. Young men and young women need to think a little less of pleasure and a little more of duty. We give in to every dominant impulse through sheer moral cowardice and feebleness of mind.

In its essence great courage like Nehemiah's is great faith. It was because he believed in God, and believed that he was doing God's will, that he was able to rise above all selfish fears. This is the secret of strength. As the Psalmist said, "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." Well might Nehemiah be strong and of a good courage when he felt himself within the sweep of God's purpose, when he had emptied his heart of all selfish desires and sought only to do God's will. Well might he say, Should such a man as I flee?—a man sure of himself because sure of God, a man privileged to undertake a great work, a man who feels himself a co-worker with God for the high ends of His Kingdom. It is only the same cause that can produce the same effect. If we had the same simple confidence in God, the same submission to His will, the same consecration of all our powers, we would have something of the same calm courage. If we made more of duty, and took

the burden humbly on our shoulders, we would be strengthened by the very bearing of the burden to endure it. Faith is the true method of life, after all. Courage is the true way to high success. A sense of duty to God will save a man from weakness, will breed in him the iron nerve and steadfast courage and the endurance which is the crowning quality of great hearts.

> Not once or twice in our rough island story
> The path of duty was the way to glory.

And if the path of duty be not to all the way to glory in the large public sense in which Tennyson used these words about the Duke of Wellington, it will be at least the way to peace and true honour. Unless there be in a man's life a sense of duty which makes certain things necessary, things that he ought to do and must do, and certain things that he must refuse and will refuse at all costs, how can he escape being weak and wavering? He is the fit mark for any sudden and swift temptation. Unless a man can take his stand upon right and stiffen his neck against temptation to desert it, how can he expect to avoid open shame somewhere? Without it you are the victims, never the masters of your fate. Till you have some courage of conviction, refusing to

follow even a multitude to do evil, till you know the bit and the bridle and the spur of duty, going its way and not your own way, you are useless for the world's best ends. Till you have learned to say No, everlasting No, on some subjects; No, everlasting No, to some enticements, you have not begun to live as a moral being. There is nothing that our young men and women need more to-day than this courage, which adds a hard fibre to conscience, and gives stability to character. We are too pliant and flexible and flabby, too easily cowed into giving up principles, too easily moved by a sneer, too easily browbeaten by a majority, too timid in following our own best instincts. The sense of duty, paramount and supreme, seems weakened in our midst.

Duty cannot be maintained as an inviolate rule of life without moral courage; and courage cannot be maintained without consecration. Thus it is religion which preserves sacredness to human duty. It is the inspiring fount of noble endeavour. When a man is consumed with the desire to please God, he is long past the mere desire to please self. When the heart is fixed, the feet naturally take the path of God's commandments. The new affection moves the life to new obedience. The love of Christ drives

out the lower loves; and gives power in the hour of temptation. Should such a man as I, redeemed, sanctified, with the seal on my brow and the cross on my heart, flee from my corner of the battlefield?

XIV

HAUGHTY EYES

A thing the Lord hates, yea, is an abomination to Him, a proud look (haughty eyes, R. V.).—PROVERBS vi. 17.

THE phrase which prefaces this list of things hateful to God, "These six things doth the Lord hate, yea seven which are an abomination to Him," does not mean that the writer had thought of six things and then, as an afterthought, added still another. It is an idiom like our similar phrases, one or two, three or four, six or seven, suggesting a more or less indefinite number. The writer does not mean that these exhaust the list. What he says is that there are certain things utterly opposed to God's way and will, and among them certainly are these; and first in the list is a "proud look," or, as the actual Hebrew words have it, "haughty eyes."

We are not surprised that this should come first, in a passage which deals with the relations of men to their fellows. The word implies here not only pride and conceit and selfish regard, but also its

inevitable result of disregard for others' feelings and rights; for it is here put along with other anti-social sins, falsehood and cruelty and murder. The haughty eyes mean that feeling of the heart which expresses itself in the selfish life and the scornful attitude, and which finds its first expression in the eyes. The high look is the fruit of the proud heart. Further, we are not surprised that haughtiness should be put first in the list of hateful things, since this is the consistent teaching of the Bible, which makes pride the great separator between man and man typified by the early story of the pride and fall of Babel, and which makes pride the great separator between man and God since God can only dwell with the humble soul. Thus the Church has ever put pride as the first of the seven deadly sins. This Book of Proverbs, with its wise outlook on life, constantly refers to pride as an offence to men and as hateful to God.

The haughty eyes are the symbol of the pride of life, the boastful consciousness of power, the arrogant self-complacency of success. This is the besetting temptation of strength, to trust to the arm of flesh, and in a swollen self-importance to display an insolent, overbearing temper towards all lowly people. In the sunshine of prosperity it is so easy to imagine

ourselves people of surpassing merit, and to develop a fine overweening sense of personal dignity which blossoms into either scornful indifference or supercilious disdain. It is not an out-of-date subject to take the haughty eyes for a text. We can see them every day in Sir Scornful or my Lady Arrogant; and they look at us or overlook us every day. "There is a generation," says another proverb, "oh, how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up." It is not all a past generation, is it? The same temptations reach home in the poor heart of man in almost the same way through the ages. The dress and fashion of life changes, but life itself is menaced ever in the same place: the same pitfalls gape for the unwary feet.

We know that generation with the lofty eyes and the eyelids lifted up; we have seen the strut and the stare, the arrogance of manner, the proud disdain, noted by the observant proverb-maker in the streets of Jerusalem. Have we had no secret admiration for what we call the grand manner and the superior air? Have we never ourselves practised the haughty eyes, never looked down on humble dependants, never shown contempt for those we thought beneath us, never made inferiors feel what a great gulf yawned between them and us? Is it only the cynic who

can describe the progress of a man who gets on in the world by what he sheds as he rises, by those he can afford to overlook at the different stages of the rise? He learns to despise his home and early friends, to desert the church of his fathers which has helped to make him prosperous. He learns to assume more and more of the lofty eyes and the eyelids lifted up. It is part of his social triumph, according to our accepted notions, that he should look his position, as we say. The way to be superior is to show your superiority—that is the rule of worldly wisdom, and the rule seems to be proved by its success.

Indeed, it is no wonder that there should ever be in the world a generation of the haughty eyes; for we cherish a keen admiration for them, and secretly acknowledge the lofty claims the eyes challenge. The pride of life—why, we pay daily homage to the pomp and the state and the trappings. We think the haughty eyes quite in keeping, even though they are cold with insolence and affected indifference. How we poor fools admire the proud look, taking a man mostly at his own valuation! We will even imitate it in our own way. We overlook and despise humble worth at our door, and envy the high ways of pride. We admire the calm sense of superiority and the dignity. There *is* a dignity, a grand manner,

a real lofty grace, worthy of all admiration and all emulation, but it is usually the spurious sort that glitters so gaudily and attracts us. It is hardly to be wondered at that we should breed in our midst many various specimens of the egoist, with a superb self-complacency, who walks the earth calm in the assurance that his merits are written large over his whole body as the proof of his excellence is seen in his broad acres or in his lordly abode. Read George Meredith's *Egoist* for the finished and unapproachable article. Men bow before the haughty eyes, and flatter the arrogance and call it natural and proper pride. But there is a thing which the Lord hateth, yea is an abomination to Him—haughty eyes.

If it were only in the eyes it would not matter much, but it is in the eyes because it is in the heart, because it is part of the very tissue of life. The pitiful thing is that what we take as an assured sign of complete success is the evidence of absolute failure, failure to learn the lesson of life, failure to master the real conditions of true living. If we have not learned to look upon life with gentle eyes and touch it with tender hand, what have we learned? If we have not learned the meaning of love, we know nothing of the secret of life. There is nothing but bitterness in pride. There is no chance of true happiness

and peace there. It means division and strife and hatred. The haughty eyes are a sign of isolation and separation. There is no real satisfaction or happiness in the pride that cuts a man off from the sympathy and fellowship of his brethren. The high place apart from the mass of men, the high place that we covet and scramble to reach, is a hard and cold seat where the best qualities of heart and soul wither in the chilly air. That can be no success which has for its goal disdainful pride.

The haughty eyes that reveal the poor vain heart are a pitiful end for life, that might have been so rich in love and service, in sweet sympathy and generous help, finding its return and reward in grateful smiles and moist eyes. Was there ever such folly, none the less foolish because so common, that men should be seen refusing the treasure and grasping at the bauble, trampling on the substance and pursuing the shadow? We make pride the token of success, when it is the patent sign-manual of absolute failure. The haughty eyes, what do they know of the secret and the joy, what can they even know of happiness and peace? Even judged from its own low standard, by its own chosen scale of material good, its end is failure. This Book of Proverbs rubs in this lesson by many a saying, from

the point of view of worldly wisdom even. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." It is true, and the proofs of it can be seen on all hands. Pride opens man or nation to calamity. The haughty eyes cannot see the facts of the case. Pride makes a man think he is in need of nothing when his real poverty is abject. It makes him imagine he is safely standing just when he is tottering to a fall.

It is not hard to explain why failure should be the fate of pride. For one thing, it keeps a man from learning, from benefiting by either advice or rebuke. Arrogant self-complacency seals the mind and cuts a man off from any chance of learning the lessons of life. "With the lowly is wisdom," says another proverb. For them there is at least an open door where wisdom can creep in. They are willing to admit ignorance, willing to own their need of light and leading, ready to take guidance and to learn the reproof of life. But conceit can never learn. That is one reason for its inevitable failure. Openness of mind, simplicity of heart, willingness to be taught, are first requisites for success.

A second reason for the failure is that pride provokes opposition and hatred. We can see this by the unfeigned and universal delight shown when its

teeth are at last drawn. The bitter contempt of others and the insolent despising get paid back in hatred. There is an innate desire for justice which makes men everywhere delight when the biter is bit, when the haughty spirit rides for a fall. It is not in human nature that men should love the supercilious self-esteem. Men in their heart of hearts hate the haughty eyes, even when they fawn the most. Pride always means strife; it excites the worst passions in men; it inflames ill-will, envyings, heartburnings, and all the poor ambitions to go one better than their neighbours, all the petty social struggles that give such material for the satirist. With all the sincere flattery of imitation and our stupid admiration of proud disdain, men hate the haughty eyes.

More, God hates it. It is foredoomed to failure. "A thing the Lord hates, yea is an abomination to Him—haughty eyes." It is not only an offence to men; it is a sin to God. "God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble." It is not on any principle of tit-for-tat, retaliation. It is not a penalty appended to pride, but a condition inherent in the very nature of the case. Only to the humble can God give Himself: only the child heart can see the Kingdom. The beatitude is not a reward added

to meekness in payment for having overcome pride. It belongs to meekness as part of itself—"Blessed *are* the poor in spirit," "Blessed are the meek." "The Lord dwelleth with him that is of a humble spirit." There is no other human habitation He can enter. God can only dwell in the heart that is purged of pride and self-complacency. What have the haughty eyes to do there in the apocalypse of soul? They must be washed with penitential tears till the self-esteem and steely pride and hard disdain fade and a new, soft, tender light touches them, before they can be eyes that the Lord can love. He bends down and whispers His secrets into the ear of the lowly.

"A thing the Lord hates." How can it be otherwise? It is so unlike Himself, and this is the greatest condemnation of human pride. If He treated the best of us in this fashion, how should any stand? But we cannot have so missed the lesson of His revelation as not to have at least glimmerings of the wondrous truth that the very essence of divinity is seen in the self-emptying of Jesus. His glory is seen in His grace. His majesty in His humility. His unending power is the power of His unending love. If we would find rest for our souls, we must give up the hopeless search for happiness in pride and pre-eminence and selfish ambition and

personal vanities. If we would find rest, we must learn of Him who was meek and lowly in heart. The fruit of the chastened, humble, pious soul, weaned from the pride of life, is the Psalmist's sweet song, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child." The feet are near the goal and the heart near the secret, when a man can say that with any sincerity. The whole life has absorbed some of the sweetness that faith breeds. Ordinary experience can teach how poor are the common ambitions and how empty is the house of pride, but only faith can lead out of the prison-house into the way of love and service. Only faith can give that detachment from the world which lets a man be in it though not of it, serving it, loving it, because serving and loving a higher. The love of God changes the world, puts a new light on life, till we see what are the things that alone count, the things that belong to our peace. The love of God will sweep the mind of its pitiful pride and its false contempt for others. The love of God will melt the proud heart, and subdue the stubborn will, and school the haughty eyes, and make them eyes that "are homes of silent prayer."

XV

THE GLORY OF LOVING-KINDNESS: A MEDITATION AT COMMUNION

And he said, I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory. And He said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the Lord before thee.—EXODUS xxxiii. 18.

MOSES' request is a human and even a natural one, though it may sound like presumption. To enter into the mysterious Presence, to know what is at the heart of the universe, to pierce through the material veil that cloaks our sight, to be sure of the reality of the unseen world, must always be the supreme aspiration of the high heart of man. In some form or other it has been the great desire of man to see God's glory. In our day this desire may be stated in scientific terms as the search for truth, but it is only in line with the old high curiosity of the religious soul. Indeed it is not curiosity in the ordinary sense, but far more akin to adoration, the desire to prostrate the whole being before the Most High. In adoring wonder and awe men have dreamed of God's glory, the Kingly grace of the

Heavenly Court. Amid the mists and flickering twilights of earth we would stand in the full blaze of the perfect light. There are moments when men must long for an Apocalypse, a complete revealing of the mystery hid from all ages. Even if we know little of such moods, we yet can have some sympathy with the desire, when a human soul longs for the divine effulgence though the glory blind him, when he would be broken of pride and emptied of self and lie prostrate before the Great White Throne.

The most wonderful thing in the Bible is the spiritual insight which interpreted God's glory, the revelation of what constituted the supreme grandeur and majesty of God, the lustre of His glory. Glory to us is associated with magnificence and dazzling splendour, the pomp of power and the pride of place. Our vain earthly minds think of brilliant pageantry and imposing state, the scarlet and the gold, sceptre and throne, and all the insignia of majesty; and men have often spoken of the divine glory by words that express lavish grandeur, wealth of colour and radiant light and the music of the spheres. Put alongside of all such word-painting, to express the ineffable glory of God, this answer, and you will understand Revelation in its most awe-inspiring aspect. "I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory. And He said, I

will make all My goodness pass before thee and will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee. . . . And the Lord passed and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." Can anything match that for real majesty? Could anything be further away from our common vulgar conceptions of what true glory is? From that follows in spiritual necessity all the long story of grace, the Incarnation, and the Cross—God's sublime answer to man's prayer, "Shew me Thy glory." Have we yet understood what the answer is, and what it should mean to us? This revelation of God's essential nature puts the emphasis not on power but on goodness, not on splendour but on kindness, not on the blazing halo but on the soft light of love. "Shew me Thy *glory,* I beseech Thee. I will make My *goodness* pass before thee."

Goodness means kindness, loving-kindness, as it is so often expressed in the Psalms, "the loving-kindness of the Lord." What material splendour could compare with this wondrous moral glory here revealed as God's nature and attributes? What compare with the spiritual beauty of the thought? And it is no isolated answer, a flash struck once and lost again. It is the one consistent thought of the

Bible, growing in distinctness, gathering fresh tokens of grace, making new evidences of goodness pass before men's eyes, spelling out the sublime Name more and more simply and more and more visibly, till the Word became flesh and men beheld His glory.

Men could not easily recognise it in such lowly guise, as even now we still revert to our vulgar standard of glory and are blind to the beauty and shining grace of love. "Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek"—and they did not recognise their King *because* He was meek. What an exposure of man, and what a revelation of God!

The Lord of Glory came unto His own, in all the true imperial majesty of love; and His own received Him not, because they were not able to recognise glory when they saw it. Yet are we farther advanced in our standards and tests? The world has learned slowly the meaning of greatness as Jesus revealed it. We surely know our hearts well enough to admit that only men of spiritual mind could have recognised the supremacy of Christ amid all the signs of weakness and poverty and failure with which He came. Would we have looked for glory in the tender grace of gentleness, and in the power of pity, and in the sweet dignity of love? Would we have recognised the divine glory as all that goodness passed

before us, the goodness of the Son of Man? It was not as the ordinary lordships, which find instant and easy response among men. Have we no sympathy with those who found a stumbling-block in the Cross?

In moments of spiritual intuition we see that the true majesty of God must be found in just this passion and sacrifice and love, because in these moments of intuition we see that therein lies the real greatness of life; but this is not our normal mood, even after the great object-lesson of Christ and Him crucified. Yet here, detached from the world of sense, which so clogs our soul, we see from the standpoint of our Holy Communion how consistent all revelation has been in this respect. Right back from the cross of Calvary to the cradle of Bethlehem; back from the mystery of our Lord's death through His whole life and teaching and back through the long story of grace, through the complete revelation of God—and here is one precious link in that gleaming chain of gracious self-emptying. "Shew me Thy glory, I beseech Thee. I will make all My goodness pass before thee."

The glory of God's loving-kindness! Do we not know it in our own personal experience, and recognise the beauty and the majesty? We cannot look

back over the way by which we have been led without seeing it every inch of the way, how God has given us a hundred opportunities to be persuaded by His goodness for every one to be driven by His judgments. We ought to see God's loving hand in all the joy of life as well as in the sorrow, in the light and beauty and gracious blessings as well as in the surprises of misfortune and the ugly corners of the road. Above all, the thought of the wonderful patience and forbearance of God should breed in us penitence and faith. How He has borne with us, and still bears! So great is that patience that in the perversity of our hearts we despise it and take stupid advantage of our respite. But when at last we awake to that daily, hourly mercy, new to us every new day, bearing and forbearing in spite of daily provocation, there is nothing that breaks our proud hearts and bends our stubborn will like that. It is a sign of our crassness and dulness of soul when we look upon the common as the commonplace, and despise ordinary mercies, and by our neglect abuse daily goodness. It is a sign of our vulgar materialism of mind that we judge things so superficially. Should there be anything which should so melt us as the thought of the glory of God's loving-kindness and grace? "Or despiseth thou the riches of His good-

ness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

Not here at least can we despise it, not here where we have such an example and illustration. He makes His *glory* pass before us, before our wondering eyes, and we see that it is *goodness,* the astounding glory of broken body and shed blood, the ineffable goodness of love. We only need to be here to see it; we only need to take in our hands the bread and the wine, symbols of the divine goodness beyond speech and beyond thought and beyond imagination. We only need to look. Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. "I will make My goodness *pass* before you." What a procession of grace and mercy and goodness and truth! If we cannot recognise the glory of God here, then are we too dull of eye and of heart ever to see it. But we see it as it passes before us, the love of Christ's life and death, the goodness and mercy that have followed us all our days. Our best preparation for Communion is a grateful meditation on the grandest of all themes, the loving-kindness of God. As we remember Jesus, as we recall what He did and suffered, how He lived and died, how He proclaimed God's name, and revealed His nature as merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, as we take the symbols of a love

that loved unto death, our hearts melt at the glorious spectacle of the loving-kindness of God. "I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory," we say. And He makes all His goodness pass before us. Of His fulness we all receive, and grace for grace.

XVI

THE UNRECOGNISED CHRIST: A COMMUNION SERMON

Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip?—St. John xiv. 9.

When our Lord set Himself to prepare His disciples for His departure He was met with the natural difficulties of unprepared minds. They were not ready for it, and had not been thinking of it. Hints and foreshadowings and even foretellings had passed over them without any definite impression. They had not been looking forward at all, except in a vague way to some great triumph for their Master when all would acknowledge Him as they did. They had been content with the present; and in many ways it was a beautiful trait in which Jesus must have found pleasure. They looked to Him with such simple trust and loyalty and love, that the future had for them no fears or doubts. They had not been looking very far ahead in any clear fashion, nor had they been looking very deep down. They had simply

taken their Master as He appeared to them, and their thoughts of Him had not much subtlety or profundity. They had listened to His teaching, had followed Him in confidence, had regarded Him with admiration and reverence and love. They had learned to know Christ in the flesh, but they had not thought much of any self-revelation in His life except in rare moments of insight, and had put from them any thought of His death. They had known Him as the world did not and could not know Him; but, after all, their knowledge was largely on the surface.

We do not consider enough the wonderful patience of Christ in His training of the twelve, as He prepared the little patch of soil for the seed. How often it could be said even of His teaching, "They understood not His saying." It was not unbelief so much as spiritual obtuseness. When minds are preoccupied with their own conceptions, their own fixed notions, it is always hard to get even a hearing for other ideas on the subject. It is wrong to brand the disciples with unbelief. They did trust Christ and believe on Him—that is why they were disciples. It was rather slowness of spiritual apprehension. They were slow of heart to believe further; so that their Lord, whom they loved and whom they thought

they knew, was in many ways unknown to them. He was the unrecognised Christ, though not in the same sense or in the same degree in which He was unrecognised by the world. "The world knew Him not." The Scribes and Pharisees and rulers and the mass of the people had no sort of recognition of Him at all. He meant nothing to them beyond the bare fact of existence, just as John the Baptist lived and died without the real significance of his life being understood; as Jesus said of him, "I say unto you, Elias is come already and they knew him not."

Some of the difficulties of Christ's preparation of His disciples to receive deeper ideas of His person and work are brought out in the narrative of this chapter. Our Lord was seeking to comfort them at His approaching departure. Thomas asked for fuller information when the Master spoke about going somewhere, which He calls the Father's House. Part of Christ's reply was that to know Himself was to know the Father also. "And from henceforth," He added, "ye know Him and have seen Him." Philip's request shows that he did not understand the inference of these words; for he interrupted with the prayer, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." There is something pathetic in the very words of this prayer, suggesting the natural desire of the

human heart to enter into conscious relations with God, to see the Father. Philip may have wanted some visible manifestation, some apocalypse of glory. He gives expression to the common thought that surely something more worthy and more unmistakable might have been done to bring God near to us than has been done. "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us" is the cry of the human, both in its instinctive need for God and in its slowness to understand spiritual revelation. It was a devout and sincere wish, but in a disciple of Jesus it was a very disappointing one; for it put the emphasis on the wrong thing. It asked for some startling outward revelation that would convince every observer, without thinking how little such a revelation was worth. The revelation that Jesus was making was one of God's nature and character and essential being, not an outside attestation of His existence, which from the point of view of religion meant nothing. Here again it is not unbelief that prompted Philip's difficulty. It was slowness of understanding, defective spiritual apprehension, obtuseness, ignorance.

How gentle is our Lord's rebuke, if it can be called a rebuke. "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know Me, Philip?" The unrecognised Christ, in spite of all the opportunities Philip had

received! Could I come so close to you, and live alongside of you, and unfold My life and teaching and personality before your eyes, and be so long time with you, without being recognised? Is it possible? The revelation that Philip had asked for had been made. Day by day, hour by hour, it was there. What more could have been done for Philip than was done? There is a touch of sorrowful surprise in the question, "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know Me?" Philip would fain see the Father, and would be content if he could but be sure of that. He was seeking the Father, still seeking after that long and close intercourse with Jesus. The sorrow of the unrecognised Christ!

It was a spiritual density and obtuseness on Philip's part, a want of insight; but when we charge this on Philip, are we not made to pause by the thought of our own obtuseness? May not the charge be made against us, with less excuse in our case than in Philip's, "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know Me?" To the Church as well as to the world may the Baptist's words be often said in sorrow and in surprise, "There standeth One among you whom ye know not." How possible and how easy it is to miss the significance of things, we

are surely aware. History is full of instances of the ultimate importance of the little, unregarded, unrecognised events, and of the ultimate triviality of some of the things that bulked large in men's eyes. A small decision bent and set a man's whole subsequent life. A slight turn of policy changed the destiny of a nation. Or an unregarded movement coloured and shaped the history of the world. Nobody at the time thought much about them. They were unrecognised. Men lacked the insight and the appreciation of the true relative value of things to be able to notice and judge of what was happening.

If this is true of events in our personal and national life, how much more true and more common are mistakes in the far subtler region of spiritual judgment. Thus, it is far harder to know persons from this point of view than to estimate events. The finer a man is in temperament and the more exceptional he is in nature and character and endowments, the more readily is he misunderstood or neglected. It is not only in Judea that men have stoned their prophets and then raised monuments to their memory when dead. Genius has often to suffer lack of recognition. We do not need to labour this point that a really great man may be for a long time among us and yet be unknown for

what he is. True appreciation is indeed very rare. Our minds are so preoccupied with our own concerns; we are so obtuse and insusceptible, that we easily make a mistaken judgment of another, or sometimes we even think him hardly worth passing a judgment on, till afterwards when it is too late we realise what opportunities we have missed.

This happens all along the line of life, and not merely in cases of exceptional genius. But it is particularly true in dealing with spiritual qualities. We cannot fully appreciate the best attributes of a man's character, even though he is often in our eyes and we think we know him through and through. We discover afterwards that we misjudged or at least did not truly value him. How often it has happened that some inmate of a home who was accepted as a matter of course—I do not mean neglected or despised but just taken for granted carelessly—has been found when lost to have been the very light of the home, the source of the union and peace enjoyed. We need sometimes to be blinded with seeing tears before we see. We need to lose before we really find. We are so obtuse, or so self-centred, or so thoughtless, that another can be a long time with us without our in any real sense knowing him.

"Who knoweth the things of a man but the spirit of man that is in him?" We need to be attuned to the same key. We need to move to the same motives and serve the same purposes and be inspired with the same ideal; and even then something may escape us of the essential spirit of the man we judge. Statesmen who sat on the same bench with Mr. Gladstone did not know till his *Life* was published that in the House of Commons, before making an important speech or introducing a bill, he was sitting lifting up his heart in prayer or strengthening himself with a verse of a Psalm. The truth is that we do not know each other; we do not know even our intimates. We have not enough sympathy and insight and perception to really understand. Does not this give us some consideration for Philip's obtuseness with regard to Christ, with whom he had lived and whom he had followed, and the significance of whose person and work and teaching and life he had missed? "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know Me, Philip?"

And what shall we say of the same charge of obtuseness made against us with regard to Christ? It is a charge that can be made against His Church as well as against His world. The world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. The world's

history is being made by Him; we are indebted to Him for all that is true and pure and great in our civilisation; the river of God is full of water and flows to the healing of the nations; the influence of Jesus permeates our whole life; His spirit is to be seen in works and movements and institutions that would turn the desert of the world into the garden of God; He has let loose forces that keep life green and keep society sweet; on all sides are signs of His working—and yet the world knows Him not; men leave Him out of their thinking, their calculations, their philosophy. He is the unrecognised Christ still. Can His heart feel no pang that He should have been so long time with us, so long exercising His redemptive ministry, and men do not know Him?

We can understand thus better that pathetic word of the prophet describing the unregarded love of God, "I taught Ephraim to walk, holding them by the arms, but they knew not that it was I who healed them." Blessed love of God that is not tired out by the ingratitude of man, by the obtuseness and blindness of our hearts! The impotent man at the pool who waited fruitlessly for the moving of the waters had a gracious visitor one day. Jesus came and Jesus went, "and he that was healed wist not who

it was." He only learned afterwards when Jesus found him in the Temple.

Must we not confess that this spiritual obtuseness which fails to recognise Christ for what He is is not confined to the world that passes by without thought, but is to be found in the Church, in the disciples to-day as in Philip of old? How often we learn afterwards the truth of the word, "I girded thee, though thou didst not know Me." We went to war on our own charges, as we thought, and we learn that the reason why we came out without dishonour did not lie in ourselves. It comes to us as a constant surprise to find how the Lord has been with us in daily providence in the past. We were not aware of it, but He was there besetting us behind and before and laying His hand upon us. All the mercy and goodness and loving-kindness which have followed us we do not know even now, but shall know hereafter. There have been occasions and experiences and providences to the meaning and the mercy of which we were blind, and we have wakened up to them as Jacob did at Bethel saying, "Surely the Lord was in this place, and I knew it not." Our hearts burn within us as we think of our gracious Companion, so often and so long time within us, unknown, unregarded, unrecognised.

Yet it is not all an unhappy thought, however much self-reproach we may have for our obtuseness. There is comfort and sweet content in the thought that the love of Christ is not dependent on our complete recognition of Him. He may be the unrecognised Christ, but He comes to seek and to save the lost. There is comfort in the thought that though we are blind to Him, though we are intermittent in our thought of Him and fickle in our love, He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. John Bunyan in his *Grace Abounding* tells of the days when he was under conviction, how he found his heart shut itself up against the Lord, and his unbelief set the shoulder to the door to keep Him out, even when he was most eager to have the gates of brass broken. "Yet," he says, "that word would sometimes create in my heart a peaceable pause, I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me." Surely we know enough to trust Him, to confide in His love, and to plight our loyalty to Him and offer Him our service. Was He not known to us in the breaking of bread? Did we not get new insight into His love? Long time it may be He had been with us, but that simple act of appropriating faith brought us nearer Him and we learned to know Him better. We crept nearer the central heat, and

felt ourselves nearer God. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." He hath indeed shown us the Father—and it sufficeth us.

Have some of you refused to give Him any sort of recognition, refused to make even the simple profession of faith implied in the sacrament of this day? Have you refused to associate yourselves with His Church, and refused to respond to His love? Have you room for business, for pleasure, for all the things of the world, and all the ambitions of life, and no room for your heart's true Master and your life's true Lord? Have you had time for all sorts of things and all sorts of pursuits; and no time for a thought of Him who alone can save your pursuits from vanity? "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." He is in our midst: His spirit is in all the good of our lives: His works are evident on every hand: He is not far from any one of us. He comes with the same appeal as of old for discipleship. He makes the same offer of His love as of old. He claims the same service as of old. "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me." Shall He pass out of your ken, unrecognised? Will you let Him go before He bless you? Will you let Him pass, with no leap of your heart to His appeal, no impulse to join yourself to His company, no answer to His pleading love? Will

nothing move you, even the melting passion of the Cross? The sorrow of the unrecognised Christ! And all the time you are thrusting from you your own true life, denying what you really most desire.

Ah fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He whom thou seekest!
Thou drivest love from thee, who drivest Me.

XVII

THE DISCIPLINE OF CHANGE

Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.
—Psalm lv. 19.

The Psalmist was living in a difficult environment for a man of his temper. He met oppression, and felt the high hand of the wicked. He saw all the sin and sorrow of the city, and lived among violence and strife, where the strong lorded it over the weak. He felt himself a mark for the wicked hatred of those in power; and worst of all he had tasted the bitterness of treachery, when his dearest friend, with whom he took sweet counsel and in whose company he had walked into the house of God, turned against him. He seemed to see the wicked suffering nothing, spreading themselves out in prosperity, sitting securely under cloudless skies; while he was buffeted by the windy storm and tempest. His heart was sore pained within him, not merely because of his own troubles, but also because of this hard problem of God's moral government of men. He

longs for rest, to get out of the evil city. Better the wilderness than the stress and strain of his present life! "O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away and be at rest." The contrast between his own experience and the seemingly easeful, changeless life of the oppressors wounded him to the heart, though even as he states the contrast he has glimmerings of a great truth of life and of spiritual religion, namely that there is a divine discipline of change and trouble, that these things can be used as the means for the making of saints, and that the security and rest he has been envying may be devil's lures to make men forget God and forget the high ends of human life. He predicts calamity for these same oppressors who seem above the vicissitudes of fortune; and he sees that their very immunity from trouble has misled them. The seeds of their deepest ruin have been sown in the sunshine of perpetual prosperity. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God."

If we know anything of history and anything of our own heart, we will admit the great truth suggested by the Psalmist, that when men live a smooth and easy life undisturbed by fear and unbroken by misfortune, the tendency is towards practical materialism where God is in none of their thoughts, and

sometimes even towards an infatuation of pride which makes them imagine themselves outside the plane of ordinary human life. Other Psalmists speak of this same fact, as for example in the tenth Psalm, where the wicked man swollen with pride says in his heart, "I shall not be moved, for I shall never be in adversity," regardless of possible misfortune, and quite regardless of inevitable death. Put into words, such thoughts of the heart seem like exaggeration which no man would speak, but such men live as if it were so, and never take into account the facts, even such an evident fact as that of mortality, like the drunkards of Isaiah's denunciation, "To-morrow shall be as to-day, only much more abundant." It is the lesson of all religious experience that we need to be most on our guard just when health and peace and prosperity are most fixed and continuous; and it is the lesson of all observation that evil left undisturbed only hardens itself in evil. The discipline of change plays a large part in the moral and spiritual education of men, moving them to finer and larger issues, deepening in them thought and feeling, and driving them to the life of faith and communion. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God."

It is strange that this discipline of change should

be such an important factor; for we almost feel it to be unnatural. The natural heart of man longs for peace, and looks to repose as fit and proper. It soon wearies of storm and struggle. Like the Psalmist it sighs for wings like a dove that it may fly away from tempest and strife and be at rest. Our natural ideal includes not the dark valley of the shadow, but only the green pastures and quiet waters. And though toil and strife are our daily portion, yet amid all toil and strife we ever look forward to a tranquil haven. So much is this the desire of our heart that we may be said almost to live in a kind of protest against the whirling universe of which we are a rebellious part. We feel ourselves in the midst of ceaseless change and decay, and are always seeking a centre of rest. We would hasten our escape from the windy storm and tempest.

There are, it is true, some seeming exceptions to this natural conservatism and hatred of change and longing for peace, such as the time of youth which opens its arms for the stirring adventures of life, and the spirit of the ardent reformer which longs for change to produce the desired reformation; but these exceptions are more apparent than real. It is true that youth often welcomes the strife and plunges with zest into every opportunity of adven-

ture; but it is with the dream that one day it will emerge in victory and enjoy a well-earned reward of success. It is also true that the reformer actively opposes the natural conservatism of men and looks to change, sometimes even to violent change, for the realisation of his scheme of reform; but this is, after all, only a means to him, not an end. The end is that society may through the change reach a more permanent stability, and be established more securely in prosperity and peace. It is not for the sake of the task itself, but for what the task will bring, that men undertake it. In all our fighting there ever lies behind the hope of the good time coming when arms can be laid down in peace with honour.

Yet with all our longing for peace, we are played on by forces that make for change and unrest, swirled by the ceaseless flux and flow of the tide. We have no security of tenure, open as we are any moment to any blow, or to be struck down at any corner of the road. We can be affected by endless vicissitudes, or desolated by loss so severe that we cannot bear to think of it. All the metaphors to express life touch on this aspect. It is like the swift ships, says Job, like ships driven out in the darkness, tossed on the storm, battling on to a quiet harbour. It is like vapour on the hills, says St.

James, like the fragile mist that can be withered by sun or torn by wind. There is no real rest in the world, for body or mind or heart or soul. This condition of unstable equilibrium is of course most evident in connection with outward things in our life, the trappings and circumstances. But the same transiency is seen in inward things also. Even love suffers loss, as the objects of love pass off at the dread call of death. Even faith cannot remain fixed, but has new problems which demand new efforts at adjustment. Thus constant demands are made on us, as we are tossed out of the easy grooves of thought and action which we love so much. We are subjected at every point to the discipline of change, so that the world almost appears to us as a kaleidoscope that changes the picture at every shake.

We must admit also, if we are honest with ourselves, that we need the stimulus of constant change if life is to attain its best results. We settle down in slothful ease and sluggish indifference, with eyes blinded and hearts made fat by the prosperity that knows no fear. Changelessness would only lull the senses and the faculties to sleep. We are only kept alert by the unstable tenure with which we hold life and all it contains. If we knew we would only meet

the expected, and always at the expected turn of the road, there could be no expectation at all, no wonder, no apprehension, no fear, no hope, no faith. Experience could bring no education; and all our powers would become atrophied.

Most of all is this true in the moral sphere. It is in no lotus isle that men are bred. In the stress and the strain of life character is formed. Through doubt and uncertainty and the sore trial of faith is faith alone made perfect. The pangs of anxiety give love a new music and a new meaning. The full trough is enough to fatten swine, but more is needed for the making of men. If all went smoothly and softly, if life knew no dread menace, if every wind were tempered for us and an easy path ever prepared for the feet, would we be better men and women? Being such persons as we are, if we had our lubberland of bliss, would we lift our eyes above and beyond? If there were no changes, would we fear God?

As a matter of fact, degeneracy has always set in both with nations and with men when prosperity has been unchecked and the sunshine of favour has been unalloyed. The great races have been reared through conflict and struggle, emptied from vessel to vessel till they were purified from the lees. It is

through the conquest of nature, and through the conquest of enemies, and through self-conquest that the conquering peoples have been built. The lesson is painted on a large canvas in universal history; and it is repeated to us in miniature in individual experience. Men live only by custom and convention when they are withdrawn from this discipline of change; and to live only by custom is to be drugged by an opiate. Everything that makes man great partakes of the discipline. There is no music in a monotone: there is no art in one universal drab colour. Thought is born of mystery. Science is the daughter of wonder, and wonder is the fruit of all the changes and movements of the world. Religion even has her secure empire in the hearts of men through the needs of men's hearts, chief of which is the need of a changeless centre in the midst of change. In all regions we are trained and disciplined by the surprises of life, even by the precarious hold we have on all that we possess. When we have no changes we fear not God: when we have no lessons which convince us of our weakness we grow self-sufficient and self-indulgent. We cannot do without the sharp lessons, even the bolts that come out of the blue that show us how helpless we are. Every deep crisis of life, with its thrill of joy

or its spasm of sorrow, with its message of loss or of gain, is part of God's higher education. "Lord, by these things men live," said Hezekiah raised from the brink of the grave; and many a man since Hezekiah's time has known how true this is.

How easily we forget God! How readily we live for the present, and float idly on the surface of things when we have nothing to do but to lie back and let the stream carry us! Moral degeneracy creeps upon the man or the nation that sits at ease, as the stagnant pool breeds malaria. The water needs to be ruffled by breeze and stirred by storm. We are not fit for the peace and prosperity for which our hearts long. Sometimes even the languid, heavy atmosphere needs the thunder and the lightning and the tornado. If it be so, if to have no changes is to lose the fear and worship and love of God, if to have what we desire is to smother the soul in fatness, then banish the evil dream of ease, the unsanctified longing for rest; rise eagerly from these low levels; move swiftly to every high thought and noble passion and generous service; thus even creating the occasions, welcoming the changes that remind us of God, that recall us to our great vocation as the children of God, who cannot be satisfied with plenty of victuals and freedom from care if the craving

of heart and spirit find no satisfaction. The cloudless sky is a mockery if it speak not to us of God. The gaining of the whole world is failure if it mean to lose the soul. The light is darkness if it hide from us the eternal world which is our true home. It is a poor thing to have immunity from changes, if by that we have lost our fear and reverence and love of God.

The discipline of change is meant to drive us out beyond the changing hour to the thought of eternity, out from the restless things of sense to find rest in God. The deepest lesson is that which the Psalmist reached through all his troublous experience, "Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." He is the changeless in the midst of change, a centre of rest for the restless soul of man. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; the same in nature, in character, in love, even as Jesus revealed Him, the Eternal Father who yearns over His children in deathless love.

"Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." If that is failure, even though it means continual peace and prosperity, what shall we say of the failure of those who know the desolation and terror of change and yet have not learned, who still cling to the things of sense that

have failed them before, who have suffered all the strokes of fortune, all the pangs of heart, all the shocks that paralyse the soul, and yet have never submitted, never trusted, never feared, never loved God? What failure is like that of those who have been chastened and yet never been softened, who have gone through the fire without learning the lesson, who have tasted the sorrow without the sympathy, who have borne the cross without the love? What shall we say of those who have lost the soul without even gaining the world, who know the illusion of life without learning the meaning of it, who have seen through the transient show of things but without reaching to the heart of love? If it be failure to have missed the fear of God even though fortune has smiled its fairest, what failure is that which has been broken by change, and come through all its discipline, and yet is deaf to the lesson? A more tragic failure than that of our text is it to have to say, Although they have changes, yet they fear not God.

XVIII

FAITH'S ILLUSION

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off.—Hebrews xi. 13.

In this magnificent catalogue of heroes the one point of union is their faith. In diverse situations, at vastly different periods of history, each with his own particular work and his own special temptation, the problem of life to all was essentially the same, and the solution they reached was the same. The one common element is that they lived by faith. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Divided by centuries, separated by all the variety of environment that we express by the phrase the gulf of time, they were alike in this, that they all had the inward eye, and saw beneath, and above, and beyond. In all, and through all, and above all, they saw God, and lived in the inspiring vision of God.

The world, with its dull eyes and gross touch upon life, calls this motive unreal, and derides it as

intangible and visionary. But where in all history is to be found such a motive for great action and great thought? The apostle frankly calls it visionary, and makes that the one test and dividing line among men. The heroes of faith all lived upon promises, things only hoped for; and conquered the world and endured as seeing the invisible, never content with the present, ever seeking a country, looking, ever looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. From age to age the just have lived by faith; from age to age they have stood as a protest against materialism which in some form or other is the persistent temptation of the human heart; from age to age God has had His witnesses. The centuries are bound together by the golden chain of faith. The wonderful roll-call of faith in this chapter of Hebrews is only typical of that great society among the sons of men, "the noble Living and the noble Dead."

The essential feature of this nobility is what the apostle calls faith, by which men's souls were released from the entanglements of the present, and set to thoughts of high emprise. The immediate effect of their work was often very little; they sowed for what their own hands could not reap; they struggled after what could not be easily

realised, even after what could not sometimes be put in words; and at the last failure could be written over their work; they had nothing to show for it but a dream; they had lived on the strength of an empty promise, and died not having received the promise, but they died in faith.

Is not this a true reading and interpretation of the lives of Old Testament saints? There is a sense of incompleteness everywhere, a lack of fulfilment. It is an unfinished story. The soldiers fight and fall in an inconclusive battle. The story has no end: it has ever to be continued. Men project their lives into the future, and suffer continually from the thraldom of the present. The temple which eager brains and hands strive to build is not for themselves, build they never so manfully. Was there ever so ineffective an ending as that of Abraham, the father of the faithful himself? Leaving home and kindred with the vision of a splendid inheritance, and dying merely the head of a few shepherds, with no foot of ground to call his own but the tomb in which his dead body was laid? Generations passed away after him with the same futile dream, and died with nothing but as heirs of the same promise—victims of an idea, seeing it afar off, and never realising it.

Take any stage of the religious history of Israel, and the same thing is seen. All through the long decline of Israel under the Kings, the spiritual significance of the Davidic ideal of a king grew. The prophets held to it, and pointed to the glad time when it would be fulfilled by a son of David governing the kingdom for God. The people buoyed themselves up in the hope of that future by thoughts of the glorious past. There was partial realisation of the ideal in some of David's descendants, such as Hezekiah and Josiah, who were pledges of the Kingdom to come. But of few of their actual kings could it be said, that they "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord like their father David." And through the very disappointment the spiritualising of the faith went on, till a prophet saw the ideal king in a gentle sufferer, bruised for the iniquities of his race. The hope of the future Saviour never died out of Jewish hearts. The faithful of all ages waited for the consummation of Israel, living on a promise, with faith in things *not seen*. These all died in faith not having received the promise, seeing it ever afar off.

The essential quality of faith is still the same, and to us also come only new promises, new visions, new hopes, which demand the same endurance, and

ask for the same faith. The summit of the mount is gained, but beyond are other heights, a horizon beyond every horizon. The Kingdom of God has no boundaries, no limits which say to the aspiring soul, Thus far and no further! The ideal recedes as we advance, not because it is unrealisable, but because, as it is being realised, it grows richer and grander. The grace of God is infinite, in content as well as in extent. There are treasures of wisdom and knowledge hid with Christ in God to be revealed. The writer of this Epistle declares that the promises of the new covenant are better than the promises of the old just because they are more spiritual. The old promises have been fulfilled, but there are still promises. Here like Abraham, he says, have we too no abiding city, but we seek one to come. Every attainment is a new prophecy: every fulfilment is a new promise.

The Master's last word to His disciples was, "Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you." The Apostles speak of the promise of the Spirit, and the Holy Spirit of promise. To each Christian heart it is to some extent fulfilled; but have any ever exhausted the promises, so that there is nothing beyond, no longer any need of further hope and prayer? Have any ever got to the end of the prom-

ises? We have enough for life and for death; we see far enough to walk, and have experience enough to believe. And in this sense the promise of the Father is fulfilled to us, so that it is possible for a believer to say, as I heard it of an old saint, who as he was a-dying wakened up to a moment of consciousness, and whispered to his friends, "I want to tell you that none of the promises have failed." He meant that the love of God was sufficient for him even in the valley of the shadow; he tasted the sweetness of perfect trust in Christ his Saviour; but for him too there were to be new awakenings, new openings of the way, other heights in other lives.

We too must be saved by hope, as truly as the patriarchs. We too must live by faith as they lived. The promise of the Spirit to the Church has heights unscaled, and depths unfathomed. We pray still for the Kingdom to come, come though it is, and coming. The Kingdom of God on earth, in the hearts of men, in the midst of men, what it shall mean in the personal life, what it must mean in the social life, who can predict its fortunes, and set bounds to its sway? Who can cast a horoscope for the King who comes to His own? The Kingdom of Heaven, not realised, but being realised, who can put words to the promise and potency of it? The

world's redemption is in it: the future of man is bound up with it. We must look far through time to see the climax of the Kingdom, begun as a grain of mustard seed. We too must die in faith, not having received the promise, but seeing it afar off, a glory that shall be revealed.

Life shall be judged not by its grasp, but by its reach; not by its failure to receive, but its faith to dream and dare. When Seville Cathedral, one of the glories of Spain, was being built, they said, "Let us build such a work that those who come after us shall take us to have been mad." Nay, the men of the time might think the project madness and might sneer at the dreamers, but not those who come after and see the noble building. Nay, they are justified at last, as all who work in faith are justified, whether they receive the promise in their own time or not. The work which has no inspiring motive of faith, which has no touch of romance, the work which has no larger object than itself, fails. The life which has no outlook, no thought for anything but itself, the life which will not venture forth in faith, which will not risk a noble shipwreck, fails. The character which is not built on a foundation broader than is justified by the length of life, which leaves out of account the promise of the future, the character

which shapes itself only for the passing day, fails. While the work and character and life which are inspired by faith, have in them the seeds of eternity. They die not who die in faith. They live not in vain who live in faith. Though they receive not the promise, as the world counts receiving, yet they live by the promise. Scoffers say, Where is the promise of His coming? but the heart of faith sees, though afar off, yet sees the flaming of the advent feet.

The true test of life, the standard by which it must be judged, is not attainment, but faith. One man may set before him a small purpose, and may succeed. Another may have a large design, and may fail. One man may always keep well within the practicable: another may strive after the impossible. We know how the world with its outside standards will arrange the two men. It has rough-and-ready classifications. But it does not follow that the man put down by the world as a failure is such. He may have failed because he tried for things which the world has no value for, but which yet are invaluable. For instance, the man who strives to amass a fortune may succeed, and may deserve his success for his enterprise, and foresight, and strenuous work. We can at once put a value to what he

has achieved. A man who sets before himself mental culture, or even more the man who gives himself to growth in grace, to the development of spiritual character, cannot flaunt his achievements in all men's eyes. He may even have failed in reaching the highest to which he set himself—is he therefore on a lower plane than the other? Nay, it may be that he is of a finer quality, and for that reason aimed at higher quarry. It may be that he has touched heights of which the other has not even dreamed. To die not having received that for which he strove seems utter failure. To have only seen afar off that for which he lived seems failure. But the success is to have *seen* at all. Speak not of failure of the man who dies in faith, who dies as he has lived with his face to heaven.

Brethren, seek earnestly the best gifts; for not by what you get but by what you seek will your life be judged; not by what you receive but by what you see; not by the gain but by the faith. In life we often get by the way more than the goal itself contains. The real gain of learning is not the price it can command in the market when acquired, but itself, the enrichment of mind the pursuit brings. The gain of godliness is not anything it can do for us as a policy, but itself, the deepening of the soul.

The value of the promise which turns our eyes to God and our feet into the way of His commandments, is not the particular fulfilment of the promise, but the effect of it in so turning us to God. The promise may never be fulfilled as we expect it, and yet may effect its great purpose on us all the same. Jeremiah's thought of a King in Jerusalem as a signet-ring on the hand of God was never literally fulfilled, but was it nothing to Israel and to him that he dreamed the dream? It prepared the way for a greater than Solomon in all his glory. He died in a foreign land of a broken heart with all his hopes for Israel shattered; he never received the promise; but he died in faith, seeing the glory of the Messiah afar off. To die in faith is to know as the aged saint knew that none of the promises have failed; for His love faileth never.

The promises are not for their own sake; but for our sake, that through the very elusiveness of all earthly realisations we may be led to a greater end. This elusiveness is part of God's education for us. It is meant to lead us past all worldly ends, past all earthly fulfilments, past all promises themselves, to God the Promiser. This is the avowed purpose of them. "There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be

partakers of the divine nature, and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust." Blessed promises, exceeding great and precious, that result in such an escape and such a partaking! Blessed faith which so keeps the garments clean for the hope set before us, however far off! Blessed failure which has such splendid success! Blessed though we see not all things brought under us if we see Jesus who confirms the promises made unto the fathers, if we see Jesus, the conquering Christ putting all things under His feet, the first-fruits of our redeemed humanity!

Children of the promise, born into the covenant, it is not for us to measure results, and ask for signs, and walk by sight. Children of the promise, it is for us to live in the power of an endless life, and die in faith. Children of the promise, let us too look and pray for a city which hath foundations, and seek a better country, and keep step with Christ as He leads us to new tasks and untrodden paths, to the City of God.

XIX

STRIFE *VERSUS* LOVE

Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.—PHILIPPIANS ii. 3.

HITHERTO the Philippian Church had given St. Paul unalloyed gladness. He asks them now to fulfil his joy, to make his cup brim to overflowing. He tells them that the way to do this, to give him a joy as pure as the joy in the presence of the angels, is to display in their midst unity, and peace, and love. He demands from them more than personal faith and righteous life. He longs to see the Christian *social* virtues fully developed among them, till they become a true Christian community, of one heart and mind, ruled not by selfishness but by love. Such a society, inspired with such noble motives, where every part found its fit place in humble and devoted service, would have something of the radiant beauty of the life of Christ. In furtherance then of this ideal—this dream of the Apostle's, if you like—he says, "Let nothing be done through strife or vain-

glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

The word translated "strife" means not so much personal as party contention, factiousness, setting up one section against another, creating divisions, each seeking to get the better of the other, each with its party cry, and each dominated by party spirit, one saying as happened in the Corinthian Church, "I am of Paul," another "I am of Apollos," instead of being all moved by mutual desire for the good of all. "Vain-glory" of course means the personal vanity which incites a man to fight for his own hand, and push his own claims on all occasions, regardless of other and wider interests. These are the two great social plagues, which keep a community from realising the peace and concord of the Christian ideal, where all are for each and each is for all—the undue development of the spirit of faction, and the undue assertion of selfish personal aims. Both are here condemned. Opposed to both, Paul puts lowliness of mind, the humility which is born of love and which has its outcome in generous service. The harmony of a Church may be destroyed by party spirit, sectional strife, seeking not the greatest good of the whole but the triumph of a party: or the harmony may be destroyed by personal

ambition, when men seek their own selfish aggrandisement, and are inspired by vanity rather than by the love of the brethren. St. Paul asks the Philippians to resist both temptations, as sins against Christian charity. "Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory."

There are two great opposing motives in life, two methods of doing work, strife and love, competition and co-operation; and it is not difficult to say with which of the two rests the hope of the race for a higher civilisation and true religion. The spur of competition is a useful motive within limits, but all social progress has hitherto been got by strengthening and restricting the limits. Civilisation only begins when co-operation of some sort comes in, when the struggle for existence ceases to be a purely personal one. To make life a kind of free fight, a state of strife where a man's hand is against other men's and theirs against his, is to reintroduce anarchy, and anarchy is an end of all things. No pure individualism can from the nature of the case succeed in the redemption of a society. The world has risen from savagery by putting limits upon strife as the prime principle of living. Progress has been achieved through the social bonds, through the family, through community of interests,

through patriotism, through union never through disunion, through love never through strife. That is one reason why the future of the race is bound up in the future of Christianity. All true social progress must be along the lines laid down by Christ. Naturally we have even in our Christian society constant instances of reversion to type, just because we have not always an intelligent appreciation of the spiritual principle at the foundation of the social structure. We fit into our place, and take things for granted, without seeing the sublime religious tendency of it all. Civilisation without religion is merely a veneer. Scratch a Christian and you often get a Pagan. Still we are slowly learning that the noblest life cannot be inspired by strife or vain-glory. We are slowly learning that mere economic theories of supply and demand, and free competition, cannot in themselves insure either the greatness or the happiness of a people. And surely the Church is learning that only through having the same mind as the Lord Jesus, only through humility, and love, and service, can truth be extended, and the world be saved.

We overrate the value to society of ambition and self-seeking. We are often told of the advantage derived through men being spurred on in

competition by vain-glory and by getting the better of their fellows. Even Bacon, in his Essay which satirises vain-glory, speaks of its advantage in great enterprises of business and state. He thinks that in military commanders and soldiers it increases courage; and even in the region of literature has a good effect. "In fame of learning, the flight will be slow without some feathers of ostentation." We can see how highly we value emulation as a motive if we think how closely it is associated with almost every department of life—education for example. We imagine that little can be done without the stimulus of competition, so we establish prizes at school and college, and have our full-blown system of cram and examination—with what fatal result on true education we are beginning to find out. We habitually over-estimate the lower motives in life, emulation and the desire to get on in the world by elbowing others. Free competition in everything, "every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost"—what true work, what sublime character, what noble life have ever sprung from such? The highest motive is always the strongest, if we would only believe it. Why should we make so much of selfishness as a motive, and imagine that the world would go to pieces, if *it* were left out? Bacon's

point about the value of vain-glory in military affairs cannot be true. More battles have been lost through vain-glory and emulation than have ever been won by it, when officers seek to outshine each other instead of all working for the one great aim. Why should we take a degrading view of human nature? Is not patriotism a stronger and nobler motive to a soldier than any selfish one could possibly be? Is not love of some sort stronger than strife for any enterprise whatever? In education would not love of learning be a deeper inspiration than any artificial stimulus of competition? A boy can leave school with an armful of prizes and be a dullard all his life, just because he has never had the love of learning as a motive.

For the highest kind of work, as for the highest kind of life, strife and vain-glory are not helps but hindrances. They ruin the *quality* of work. This can be seen in its deadliest effects in all forms of art. When a man ceases to work for his work's sake, when his chief object is to surpass his fellows in the estimation of the public, he lays himself open to the worst of all temptations, to truckle to popular taste, to tricks of flashy style; and his work of necessity deteriorates. How can even his hand keep its cunning, when his heart has lost the vision?

The ultimate motive to a true artist must be not money, or fame, or rivalry, but love, love of art, love of beauty, love of men, and whatever higher love than these is possible. Strife and vain-glory debase art, as soon as they are permitted to come in. And if we are to judge of work by its quality, will not some of our modern methods of competition be condemned at once? We only need to think of the old hammer-wrought ironwork, the old stone-work of house and church lasting through the centuries, the old beautiful woodwork; and to think of so much of our modern shoddy work, with our time-limits, and competitive plans, and estimates, to feel how much love went to the one sort of work, and how much strife or vain-glory is at the bottom of the other sort.

If all this is true in our workaday life, how much more forcibly does it come home to us in our social relations with other men? No society of men can be kept together permanently on principles of strife and vain-glory. These are disintegrating principles. If such alone were the motives, no body of men could live together, or work together, or even worship together. We need more than the cash-nexus, which Carlyle so eloquently condemned. You cannot keep the world going on terms of cash

merely. Such a world, if possible, would not be worth kept going. You cannot resolve all human relationships to economic principles without degrading human life. The highest motives are the strongest motives; and when any region of life is lived on the lower plane, sooner or later it brings its own nemesis. What period of history was more humiliating to England than that part of the eighteenth century depicted in the *Letters of Junius* with their bitter satire, when corruption was prevalent and every man seemed to have his price, when self-seekers and place-seekers hustled each other in Parliament, when Edmund Burke and a few others alone stood for political principle, for duty to the public, and even for true love of country? Just when factious strife and selfish ambition and vain-glory were at their height, Britain was far on the down grade. The highest motives are the strongest motives in everything. "Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory." In Church and State, in the home life and the business life; in the long run (and often it is a shorter run than we think) these motives of action will be discredited, and must be discarded—if we are to live.

What then is the alternative? Over against these, St. Paul puts the humility of love, "in lowliness of

mind, let each esteem other better than himself." To a world which admires above everything masterfulness, and which rewards self-seeking, this must seem a feeble alternative, a weak and anæmic motive as opposed to the other full-blooded ones. But when, in addition to the acknowledged failure of the full-blooded motives, we can speak of the success of this one, the case becomes not so hopeless for the feeble humility. Take all the regions in which we have found the others to fail, work, art, education, social life, and we will see how penetrating and how potent this motive is. When did strife produce a picture? When did vain-glory make a scholar? It is a commonplace of the wisdom of the ages that humility is the very beginning of wisdom. Only when a man has forgotten self, only when he is overmastered by a larger passion, has his work or life become great.

Even for happiness, strife and vanity bring nothing but the gnawing of the worm, the serpent of envy which only stings one's own self, the jaundiced eye which discolours the world because another is preferred before oneself. But the very point about this Christian humility is that it finds its joy in the things which in the other case bring misery. Every one who has tried it knows it to be so. "We live by

admiration, hope, and love." In the Christian view of life, service is the universal rule, and each has a place in that service. All gifts are held for the benefit of all. They are no credit to those who have them; and it is no discredit not to have them. Special capacity, special cleverness, special gifts only mean special responsibility. Excellence is to be admired and loved, not envied and detracted. If each esteems other so, would not the stock of happiness be increased? I may have as much pleasure from a sonata on the organ, or a song, or an orchestral symphony, as those who perform and have mastered their art, though I could no more do these than fly. There is something wrong when men are filled with envy at superiority, instead of simply doing their very best themselves, and humbly thanking God for every gift He has given the world through another. "It is impossible to express," says Ruskin, "the quantity of delight I used to feel in the power of Turner and Tintoret, when my own skill was nascent only; and all good artists will admit that there is far less personal pleasure in doing a thing beautifully than in seeing it beautifully done."

Does this Christian humility seem an impossible alternative to strife and vain-glory? Does it appear too hard for the weak heart of man? It is hard;

but it is not hard for love. So to esteem others, so to subordinate self to them, so to recognise the excellences of others, can only be the fruit of love; for only love's eye is quick to find out the lovely things in other men. St. Paul is writing to Christians, to lovers of the same love, and in all this he is only setting forth what their faith means. If they are to be Christ's, they must have Christ formed in them; they must have the mind of Jesus in them; they must rule their lives by the new motive. If they love their Master and the brethren, if they have something of that pitiful love of men which He ever showed, this humility, and this service of others, will come easy to them. And that way lies peace, and true heart's-ease: that way lies the purest joy in all human excellence: that way lies the pleasing of God and spiritual kinship with the Lord Christ. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than himself.

XX

A LESSON IN TOLERANCE

He that is not against us is for us.—St. Mark ix. 40.

In connnction with this we immediately think of the other and seemingly opposite saying of our Lord, "He that is not for Me is against Me." This last saying I hope to treat of next Sunday by itself; but at present it may be remarked that there is no real contradiction between the two. The two truths are complementary; they are different sides of the same idea, and are each true according to circumstances. The whole question of the relation of men to Jesus is one of spiritual sympathy, and even a little sympathy to the extent at first of not opposing Him is accepted because it may grow more and more to the perfect communion. The truth of the statement, which we reserve for next Sunday's treatment, that not to be for Christ is to be against Him, is that there can be no permanent neutrality in religion. The truth of the saying which we take as our text to-day cannot be so easily put into a single sentence,

but a simple illustration will show how the two statements can be true at one and the same time according to the particular point of view of each.

At the time when Napoleon meditated an invasion of Great Britain there were in this country a great number of people who sympathised generally with the French Revolution. There were the theorists who looked upon it as a signal step in the freedom of man: there were the Chartists, some of whom looked for reform through revolt. Many wished success to Napoleon in most of his other plans; but when it came to the question of actual invasion of England, love of country, fear of foreign aggression, and other motives would make it impossible for almost any to assist Napoleon's plan by active means. Imagine him by some chance across the Channel beginning the conquest of England, trying to create a diversion among the inhabitants, and learning of the latent sympathy of some to the French Revolution: imagine him issuing a Proclamation to keep as many as possible from actively opposing him. The burden of it would be that neutrality was all he could expect; he would not ask that men should fight against their country: it would serve his purpose almost as well to keep men's hands tied. He might well think that he that was not against

him was for him. But on the other hand the British Government had the right to ask that every citizen should spring to the defence, should oppose with united ranks and to the last extremity the invader. With them there could be no innocent neutrality. Not to be for them would be to be against them. It would be virtual alliance with the foe. It would be nothing that they had not lifted their little finger to help Napoleon, and that they had preserved an impartial attitude. From the point of view of the British Government there could be no such thing as an impartial attitude. To be neutral would be to be a traitor to their country.

Now similarly, it was true of part of Christ's work that he who was not against Him was for Him. As a reformer, the introducer of a new order, from the great mass of people He did not expect more at first than that they should give Him a fair field and a fair trial. All who did not oppose Him, who gave Him a free hand in His work, really served His ends. They had enough sympathy with His objects and His teaching not rashly to counteract them; and our Lord was willing to take that sympathy as evidence that they were for Him. Think of it in connection with the supposed analogy of Napoleon in Britain and you will see that such an attitude

meant a great deal. Neutrality was something to be thankful for. There is even still a sense in which our Lord will be for the meantime content with even such little sympathy as neutrality. He asks for impartiality from every human soul. He asks each to consider His claims, and even to consider the cost. He desires decision, but not blind decision. He will have no recruits by false pretences. So spiritually, to give Him a chance, not to foreclose the question, not to shut the door in His face, not to let prejudices darken the mind, to be sympathetically open to His influence—that negative attitude is in some stages accepted. Christ's enemies are the men who put themselves outside the pale, who will not listen, will not inquire, who let prejudice rule them, who prejudge the case as it were, who commit themselves against Him. It is here we see the truth in the much-abused phrase, "honest doubt." The inquirer after truth, the sincere, earnest, humble seeker, the man in sympathy with spiritual things who would fain know and believe and love, such an one is not cruelly repelled by our loving Saviour. If we have not accepted Him as Lord and Master, if we have not whole-heartedly given in our allegiance to Him, if we are not unreservedly on the Lord's side, if we have held back our hands from

His work and our feet from following Him, it is well to make sure of our real attitude to Him, well to ask ourselves whether our hesitation has been due to want of conviction or due to enmity of spirit. And if we honestly decide that it is not for want of sympathy, if we admit the attraction He has for us, and can justify to ourselves our balance of judgment, it is well for us to remember that neutrality cannot last for ever, that soon we must rank ourselves definitely on one side or other, and that the other truth comes in that He who is not for Christ is against Him.

But this saying of our Lord's was not intended to show the place of neutrality in religion, except by the way; but was meant as a lesson in charity and tolerance to disciples; and so we pass on to that. Notice the occasion of the lesson. A man who did not belong to the recognised company of disciples had been discovered by the disciples using Christ's name as an exorcism. It is a remarkable evidence of our Lord's influence that His name should be thought so powerful. We know nothing further about the man, whether he had heard Christ speak and teach much, whether he belonged to the more or less attached circle outside the immediate circle, or whether he afterwards became a follower. We

only know that he had sufficient faith in the power of Christ's name to try to work in the strength of it. John, who reports the incident to Jesus, relates, "Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and he followeth not us; and we forbade him because he followeth not us." But Jesus said, Forbid him not; for he that is not against us is for us. It is not a case of mere neutrality; it is the case of a man who was sufficiently convinced that he appealed to the power of Jesus. He had at least the germ of faith in Him. But because he was not one of their own number they with intolerant zeal sought to silence him. And the Master rebuked them and taught them a great lesson in tolerance. This man sought to do good in Jesus' name, but did not have the regular hall-mark of service, did not have what we would call regular ecclesiastical sanction. Christ teaches His disciples that His work cannot be limited by any rules and any organisation. Their action had been prompted by purely partisan feeling. There was a touch of wounded dignity. They forbade him because he followeth not *us*. They were favoured and set apart, and they thought that as they had so much privilege they should have all power; and were a little offended by the idea that any one else could take upon himself their functions.

A good deal of past and present intolerance has the same earthly root of wounded dignity and personal pique. Men so easily fall into the mistake of the disciples here rebuked by Christ, of making visible communion with *them* the test of communion with Christ. This is the fruitful source of all the narrow bigotry and intolerant zeal which mar the annals of history, which have kindled the fire and sharpened the sword, which have substituted the doctrine of the stake for the doctrine of the cross. How hard it has been even for Christ's disciples to learn the lesson that the Spirit's operations cannot be confined to any organisation; that the Gospel of Christ is not a matter of orders, of canonical succession, of any formal arrangement or external organisation—it is spirit, it is life. The Spirit's way is the wind's way, blowing where it listeth, ordaining its prophets now from following the herds, now from the steps of the throne, now from the priesthood, now from the market-place.

To speak of the divine right of a form of Church government—Episcopacy or Presbytery or any other —is to merit the Master's rebuke which He gave to His zealous but unenlightened disciples. To confine the free grace of God to any Church channel is to sin against Christian charity. To make holiness

dependent on entrance into any community of believers is presumption. To declare in effect, in spite of mean little qualifications to abate the appearance of cruelty, that out of your church there is no salvation, is shocking impiety. To forbid in the Master's name what the Master declares is not forbidden, what is that but stiff-necked disobedience? Could we tell all that the world has lost by the sinful exclusiveness of the Church; could we tell all that the Church has suffered by the intolerance and bigotry and narrow ecclesiasticism of so many of her supporters? There is no arrogance so hateful as spiritual arrogance, which would not only enslave the soul of man, but would also enchain the Spirit of God. And when we think of His whole life as well as this judgment of His, can we imagine anything so foreign to the mind of Jesus as the intolerance which would limit spiritual gifts to a sect?

Strange though it appear, it is really in essence a form of materialism to which the heart of man is prone, limiting the spiritual by the material. The recrudescence of mediæval ideas in our own country, with false views of the doctrine of grace, warns us against imagining that our Lord's lesson is no longer needed by us. A High-Churchism which practically excommunicates all who do not belong to its com-

munion, is compelled to have a grotesque doctrine of what the grace of God is. It has to account for the fruits of the Spirit which are admittedly seen elsewhere, and it can only do so by imagining their Church as being the authorised channel of grace, through which it flows as a river flows between its banks, but here and there a little grace lips over and blesses odd people, but nobody can be *sure* of receiving grace who is outside of that particular Church. I have seen this very illustration given as an explanation of the fruits of the Spirit being seen among outsiders.

One has sympathy with the difficulty of the position. Of course if only the authorised disciples were casting out devils with the name of Christ the theory would work out all right. If grace were unknown outside the well-marked channel, all would be plain sailing with this High-Church theory. But there is this stubborn fact of the man casting out devils at the name of Christ: there are the stubborn facts of the Gospel being preached, and men being saved, and the peace of God coming over broken lives, and the love of God illumining darkened hearts, and the fruits of the Spirit experienced, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. And yet they follow not us! Shall

we forbid them in the interests of our theory of the Church? Forbid the wind to blow where it listeth; forbid the Spirit of God to claim His own; forbid the Cross of Christ to draw all men to it; forbid the blood of Christ to cleanse the hearts of sinners; forbid the eternal love of God to bring men into the fellowship of sons of God! Such a theory may seem to honour the Church, but it dishonours the Church's Head.

Some try to account for the facts of grace outside their special Church by denying the facts. It is pitiful to see a man like Newman trying to explain away the force of this great doctrine of tolerance which Jesus preached (as he does in a sermon on this passage). He does so by first of all suggesting that the good done outside his own Church, which was then the Anglican, is more apparent than real. "What seems good is often not good," he says. He hints that people may be self-deceived, and that self-appointed preachers do not really effect spiritual results, but only the appearance of them. And then his next point is that even if sinners *are* converted upon such a one's preaching, the credit really belongs to the Church and not to him. It is "partly in consequence of their having been baptised," he declares. To such straits are men brought who try to adjust the facts to suit their theory! Alas for the

small-mindedness and the lack of candour which good men can display in the interests of a narrowing dogma!

The Bible is full of lessons in this wide, large tolerance, which Jesus preached and practised. On one occasion unauthorised prophecy broke out in the camp of Israel, and there ran a young man and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp. And Joshua the servant of Moses, jealous of the honour of his master, said, My Lord Moses, forbid them. This was Moses' magnanimous answer, Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His spirit upon them. John the Baptist's disciples came to him complaining that Jesus was drawing away all the people, and their small ecclesiastical minds expected that he would thunder forth condemnation and warning against intrusion in their preserves. John answered, "A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven. He must increase, but I must decrease." St. Paul in prison heard that others, even enemies of his, were preaching Christ, and though he suspected their motives he said, "Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached, and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

When we think of the *tolerance of God* with all of us, His patience, His longsuffering with our slowness of heart, His wide, rich mercy, His free gospel of grace, how miserable are the petty barriers and limits which we set up, how sinful is our arrogance with which we unchurch and excommunicate all who do not see eye to eye with us, and follow not *us!*

It is the mark of spiritual insight to be able to recognize goodness everywhere, and assert kinship with it, to feel in sympathy with it, to accept it, and thank God for it, to claim fellowship with every good man, to share in every good work, however unauthorised by man, if only it have the stamp of God's approval. Also, it is the highest triumph of grace in us to be willing even to be set aside, to see others do the work our own hands long to do, to be willing to be superseded, to rejoice in every victory of the Cross through others, to stand aside and praise God for every evidence of His power and mercy to the world through other channels than our own, to tear away all pride and prejudice and receive as brethren all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, to comfort ourselves with the inspiring thought that He has so many instruments beyond our narrow circle, to find peace and joy in believing that he who is not against us is for us.

XXI

THE CLEAVAGE OF THE FAITH

He that is not with me is against me.—St. Matthew xii. 30.

Last Sunday in dealing with our Lord's saying, "He that is not against us is for us," we saw among other things that there is a sense in which men are justified in adopting towards Jesus, for a time at least, an attitude that may be called neutral. Historically this was so; for as the introducer of a new order, with its inevitable criticism of existing institutions and thoughts and religion, all that He could ask from the great mass of men was that they should not condemn Him unheard, but should give Him a fair trial. He could only expect from them that they should not prejudge the case, and foreclose the question by unthinking opposition. All who were impartial enough to give Him a free hand in His work, who did not take up a side against Him, were for the time being really serving His ends. Julius Cæsar when he set himself to overturn the old Roman Republic, at the beginning of the civil war took up

this attitude to the citizens of Rome. He knew that custom, tradition, and patriotism would make it hard for some of them to take up arms in his favour. He declared that he did not ask for that: he only asked them to hold their hands. Not to hinder him in his project of revolution was to help him; so he said, He who is not against me is for me. He was grateful to everybody who did not oppose him. Pompey on the other hand, who was the leader against Cæsar and who supported the old Republican form, just as naturally took up the contrary attitude. Not to oppose Cæsar was to him treason against the State; it was to be his accomplice. He practically said, He who is not for me is against me. To stay in Rome to welcome Cæsar, rather than to go with Brutus and other patriots to Pompey's camp, was virtual acceptance of Cæsar.

So, religiously it was true of part of Christ's work that those who did not take up an attitude of opposition to Him aided Him. Neutrality is not the right word to use to express the position of these people. Not to be committed against Christ, not to oppose Him as a foe, meant at least some sympathy with His work, and some faith in His motives and power. The men who were not against Him were in sufficient sympathy with Him

to refuse to counteract His influence till He had received a fair chance. The Pharisees were against Christ; their minds were filled with prejudice; they never opened their hearts to Him; they never really listened to His claims; their essential spirit was enmity to His. But there were many who felt the spiritual attraction of the Master, but who had not knowledge enough, or were not just moved enough, to cast in their whole lot with Him, but who felt He was a man of God and did not want to be fighting against God, and so would not rashly pronounce against Him; and for the time our Lord was willing to take even that amount of sympathy as evidence that they were for Him.

There is a sense still in which that seemingly neutral attitude will suffice. It cannot be the final attitude, but our Lord will accept it as a stage in the true appreciation of Him. All through His earthly ministry He refused to take rash and reckless decision. He turned men off from precipitate discipleship. He asked men to wait, to consider, to count the cost. He put before them the *per contra,* the other side of the argument, that none might become a recruit of His on false grounds. Again and again He dissuaded followers who had not taken time to consider,

His plan of campaign was no scheme of hasty propagandism. Never did leader of men so sift his followers, and put the whole case before them, lest they might be misled. All this because His work was spiritual. He sought not numbers, but hearts; and if men felt but affinity of soul with Him even to the extent of not opposing Him, He would deal tenderly with them till sympathy grew into love, and attraction became passionate conviction. And to-day the same is true. He counts no sincere inquiring soul His enemy. They are not against Him who tremble to His touch, who long to know and believe and love, who only ask to be convinced. Those who are in sympathy with spiritual things, who have not shut the door in Christ's face, who will not commit themselves as among His foes, those who are not against Him, are for Him.

If we look below the surface we will see that the other saying is not contradictory, but is even just an extension of the same principle, "He that is not with Me is against Me." It means that all men are judged by their personal attitude towards Christ. The whole question of the relation of men to Christ is one of sympathy, of community of spirit. In the first instance it is not a question of amount but of quality. The sympathy may be small,

because it has not enough opportunity or knowledge; but if it is there at all, that is the vital point. The Christian faith is not a question of judgment of intellect, of mental assent to propositions, not the things that may be believed about Christ, but affinity of spirit, likeness of soul. If there is spiritual kinship of any sort, the relationship can grow till it reaches the fullest communion. That is what determines everything: that is what is meant by being for Christ, and not being against Him. He accepts sympathy to the extent even of not committing yourself against Him; He accepts faith small as a grain of mustard seed. It is not the final stage, but if it is there it is enough to go on with. Light that flickers and wanes as of smoking flax He will not quench but will nurse till it dances into flame: life feeble as a new-born babe, so it be life, He will accept.

That is why there can be no real neutrality in religion. The stage we have spoken of as if it were one of neutrality is really one of inquiry, of openness to light, of the first dawning of faith, the first leaning towards Christ; and even that cannot be permanent. From that there must be advance or retreat. There comes a time when you must have done with balance of judgment, and

must come to decision, clear, distinct; and then if decision is refused it means really that decision has gone against Christ. You cannot sit on the fence for ever; and even if you could, not to have come down on Christ's side is tantamount to being on the other side. One says in effect, Oh, I stand aside. I take no part. I am not called on to decide one way or the other. I am a spectator looking down casually at the great struggle in the arena. It is no concern of mine. I neither love nor hate. Like the haughty soul of Tennyson's *Palace of Art*

> I take possession of man's mind and deed,
> I care not what the sects may brawl.
> I sit as God holding no form of creed,
> But contemplating all.

That attitude would in any case, even if it were possible, be one of immeasurable conceit—but it is not possible.

It might be possible, if this were a matter of speculation which had no essential relation to you. If it were merely a body of opinions, or a system of doctrine, or things to be believed or to be doubted; then you might sit loosely towards it all. But it is your life: it settles the man you are. If it were only your opinion of Christ that was at stake it might not matter much whether you had any opinion or

not. You might dismiss it as indifferent. If it were only you that were judging Christ; but it is Christ who is judging you. Simeon's prophecy regarding Him to His mother Mary has been fulfilled, "Behold, this child is set for the falling and rising of many in Israel; and for a sign that is spoken against, that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." He is the touchstone by which you are tested; and according to your attitude to Him you judge and condemn yourself. That is why no neutrality is possible, and why you cannot hold aloof even if you would, and why in the ultimate issue you must be one thing or another to Him. He divides the world. He comes to separate, as He Himself declared, brother from brother, sister from sister. Not peace—you thought He came to bring peace—not peace but a sword.

Every spiritual capacity divides men, not arbitrarily, but essentially. A great violinist once divided the world into two classes, those who play the fiddle and those who don't. The principle of selection is always along the line of fitness. The violinist was right. The world is divided musically, if not by the narrow test of a fiddle, yet by the principle of knowledge or appreciation of music. Musically the judgment is not arbitrary, but essential. Spirit-

ual selection acts automatically in the same way. Fitness for Christ's Kingdom is the condition; and fitness is determined by relationship to Jesus. It is no hard and cruel and arbitrary judgment, but the sentence of fact, declaring men and things to be just what they actually are. There is an old Jewish tradition that the manna which fed the Israelites in the desert had not one uniform taste, but tasted according to each man's mouth. We, dilettante tasters of thing spiritual, think we are judging the taste of the manna; the manna is judging us by the taste. You think you are estimating truth; truth is estimating you. You think you are balancing and weighing, and valuing with nice discrimination the Kingdom of God; the Kingdom is weighing and valuing you. You think you are assessing religion and giving it its place; religion is putting you in your own place. You think you are judging Christ; Christ is judging you. He sifts you as wheat is sifted from chaff. As iron leaps to the magnet; so some souls leap to His embrace. He winnows the hearts of men. You cannot be indifferent. Even when you think you are indifferent and are neutral, by the very fact you have made decision. Some things you reject merely by neglecting.

Realise what Christianity is and you will see that not to be for Christ is to be against Him. It is not a balance of judgment, but an attitude of soul. Christianity is a matter of holy affections, not a matter of dogma and articles of creed. These afterwards, but not in the first and the ultimate issue. You only live as you love—what is your love? Your love tests you, separates you, classifies you. There are but two Kingdoms, to one of which you belong; two Empires of the human heart. Cleared from all false issues there are only two rival kinds of life, the self-centred life, or the God-centred life. You cannot belong to both categories: they are mutually exclusive. Our Lord stated this in His strong assertion, "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." In the straits of the fight you cannot stand out as a spectator. You cannot be both friend and foe, ally and enemy at the same time; and to refuse to take your place is to let judgment go against you by default. To refuse to go to the help of the Lord against the mighty is to be an accomplice against the Lord. Your affectation of indifference is virtual decision. Neutrality is impossible. You must see and admit the force and truth of Christ's statement, "He that is not with Me is against Me."

The truth is that the neutrality so commonly

affected is merely another name for indifference. We think it prudence not to commit ourselves on one side or another, and we think it a sign of a wise tolerance to keep our minds open and hear all sides and accept no conclusion. But the reason is that we do not understand the importance of the issue. We do not care sufficiently, and so see no need for decision. We are so content with the world and with the life of sense, that the life of the spirit is killed within us. We do not reject Christ—we simply pass Him by. We are not against Christ—we simply are not for Him. This is our condemnation that in the blindness of our souls we do not see the difference between light and darkness. Our supposed neutrality is an insult.

It seems to be a mark of our age to look upon all things as equally unimportant, to look upon the world as a dull leaden grey, with no light and shade, but only a dim twilight. We seem to be in a period of indifference, in politics and literature and religion, and all the things about which men used to feel intensely. Enthusiasm one way or the other seems a lost art; passion seems dead; and the ideal with many seems to be a languid tolerance which plays with great realities, and which will neither assert nor deny. There is ardour enough for all the things

which have an earthly basis, for money and pleasure; but in the region of thought and political principle and religious belief, zeal is at a discount. In the great warfare of the ages we want to be both for and against; or neither for nor against. We try to ignore it. We are experts in balancing ourselves on the fence. Men do not seem to have enough faith even to be unbelievers.

A lower depth than blatant unfaith is the moral apathy, the spiritual unconcern that makes light of distinctions. It takes at least some faith to deny; for it means that it is thought worth denying. I would ye were either hot or cold. Better the intellectual heresies of past days than the inappetency of thought which seems to have lost the sense of taste. Better the fierce sun and the black shadow than the universal mist that makes the world a blur. Better the days of what we called dogmatic atheism than the torpor of moral insensibility. Better passionate denial than the death in life which thinks that nothing is worth living for and fighting for and, if need be, dying for. For God's sake give up your affectation of languid indifference. Protest, assert, deny, anything but the cold-blooded assumption that nothing matters. For it does matter. Whether you will or no you are compelled to take

a part. The danger of the indifference about which we speak as opposed to frank enmity of Christ is that we so easily miss the fact that we have taken sides, that in spite of our supposed indecision we have really decided. Between the Christ-life and the world-life there can be no compromise. The word to express our position is not *both* nor *neither,* but *either . . . or.*

In the long run it must be attraction or aversion of spirit; love or hate. The Lord Christ tracks you to your hiding-place and reveals you to yourself, tearing away all disguises and showing you what you are. Bring your attitude towards Him this day to the light, and make sure to yourself how you stand regarding Him and His claims over you. Make your decision openly. Assert to yourself what your attitude really is. You must be with Him or against Him. If you are not with Him you are against Him. If you have nothing in common with Him, no spiritual affinity, no sympathy with His thoughts and objects, the first gleam of hope is that you should know the facts.

To be against Christ—to have Christ against you! To hate Jesus—to suffer the wrath of the Lamb! It is hard for thee, O human soul, to kick against the goads.

XXII

THE WEALTH OF NATIONS

I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.—Isaiah xiii. 12.

(*Behold I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it.*—Verse 17.)

In the Old Testament Babylon more than any other city stood for the personification of the forces of the world against God. In the history of Israel Babylon was the scourge of God to them. They were as grain under the teeth of the threshing machine. In the captivity the Jews felt the weight of Babylon's cruelty, so that in the prophetic literature of the exile Babylon became the type of oppression, and of the insolence of material force. The thought is carried back to primitive times in the Book of Genesis in the story of the building of Babel pictured as the vain and arrogant attempt of men to rival God. "Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach to heaven, and let us make us a name."

So deep had the experience of Babylon's cruel

might entered into the heart of Israel, that St. John in the Revelation uses the word to describe the imperial power of Rome as it menaced the early feeble Christian faith. He could not get a better word than Babylon to represent the overwhelming force of the great Roman Empire, with its legions of soldiers, with its policy which made the whole world a network of nerves running back to their sensitive centre in the haughty city on the Tiber. There was the same astounding development of material civilisation, the same vanity of wealth, the same faith in big battalions, the same commercial prosperity, the same disdainful pride, as the prophet describes about Babylon. St. John saw past the glitter of conquest and the pageant of power, and recognised in pagan Rome the old Babylon which lifts her impious head against God. To him she was the scarlet woman drunken with the blood of the saints. He heard her say in the pride and atheism of her heart, as the prophet heard Babylon say, "I sit as queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow." The name Babylon came to take on the religious significance of the spirit of the world with the dead weight of the material which resists the spiritual. Over against the fair vision of the city of God is arrayed the reign of force, also pictured

as a city, insolent in her pride, impious in her fancied security, cruel in her sense of power, smiting the world with mailed fist, lifting her haughty head against God and her blood-stained hand against His saints.

The prophet, who judges not by the appearance of things, pronounces doom upon the bloated empire which seemed to stand so secure. He notes the evidences of weakness and the signs of ruin, in spite of the apparent prosperity. The careless trust in material resources, the insolence of rule, the disregard of human rights and human lives, the lusts and selfishness and pride of life, the impious atheism which disregarded God, these would all exact their inevitable price. Cruelty and oppression would react on the tyrant after their usual historic fashion. The huge treasures and boundless wealth on which they rested would only attract enemies. The crowds of slaves, and discontented subject races and the sullen populace would weaken her hand in the hour of trial, and make her in spite of her wealth an easy prey to the spoiler. The arrogant self-reliance which seemed such a strength was but an evidence of weakness.

Babylon trusted to her immense wealth, by which she could bribe enemies and buy mercenaries and

generally provide what is called the sinews of war. In discussing this point in his Essay on the *Greatness of Kingdoms* Bacon with his keen judgment says, "Neither is money the sinews of war (as it is trivially said), where the sinews of men's arms, in base and effeminate people, are failing." What can Babylon do in a case like this, "Behold I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold they shall not delight in it"? These hordes from the mountains were not to be bribed or bought over, any more than the Goths when they overran the Roman Empire. The true wealth of a nation is not to be gauged always by the state of the exchequer. To Babylon would come a time when there would be more money than men. It is a picture of absolute ruin, when the great city would be depopulated. "I will make a man more precious (more rare) than fine gold; even a man than pure gold of Ophir."

Our Christian civilisation has no place in it for some of the wrongs of men and women common in the pagan world. We have for one thing been taught at least something of the sacredness of human life. There is a public conscience which would prevent some of the hideous evils of ancient Babylon or Rome. Our government and our commerce have

been christianised to a very large extent. But the Babylonian spirit has not left the world; and every great civilisation is menaced by the temptation of forgetfulness of God, cruelty of sheer force, insolence of pride, empty trust of wealth. Our foes are the old foes with a new face. Every empire is dogged by the same temptation to rely wholly on material strength, and to add arrogance of mind to luxury of life. Not once or twice have the resources of civilisation proved helpless, when the morale of a people has crumbled down. Not once or twice in history has it been seen that the last line of defence has been not material but moral. Not once or twice has the world witnessed the strongest nations rotting to their doom, when the moral laws of life were disregarded, such as the purity of the family and the purity of justice, when wealth accumulated, and self-indulgence became the ideal. It is the lesson of history, so plain that a wayfaring man though a fool should hardly err.

Yet how easily we do err here, and think that if we only develop our material resources further, and make still further discoveries in applying natural forces, we can rampart ourselves against destiny. This pitifully common mistake could not escape an observer and thinker like Bacon. He says, "There

is not anything amongst civil affairs more subject to error than the right valuation and true judgment concerning the power and forces of a State. . . . Walled towns, stored arsenalls and armouries, goodly races of horses, chariots of war, elephants, ordinance, artillery, and the like: all this is but a sheep in a lion's skin, except the breed and disposition of the people be stout and warlike. Nay, number itself in armies importeth not much, where the people is of weak courage; for as Virgil saith, It never troubles a wolf, how many the sheep be." In the last resort it is not the money that counts but the men, not the armouries but the breed and disposition of the people. And that ultimately depends on moral and religious qualities. In the last resort a country falls back upon the soundness of heart and cleanness of blood of its sons and daughters, upon fortitude and courage and faith and sacrifice and love. If it fails there, with even a glut of gold in the markets, the word may be literally fulfilled, "I will make a man more rare than gold, even a man than pure gold of Ophir."

We are thus led by a natural transition from the first meaning of our text, which speaks of the judgment of Babylon, which shall be so depopulated that men because of their fewness will be more precious

than gold—we are led to this principle which is at the bottom of the judgment, that in the true estimate of a people the men are more precious than the gold, the type and breed and character of the manhood are of more importance than the material resources. The end of civilisation is not money but men. The true wealth of a nation is a moral value. The true history of man is the history of his conscience, the history of his moral development; for only that can give permanence and security even to all his other achievements in science or art or invention or thought. The true resources of civilisation are human, not material.

When the alternatives are put before us in this strong contrast, we will assent to the proposition; we will feet a thrill of agreement at such a graphic incident as the wager described in the *Legend of Montrose*. A Highland chieftain on a visit to England was taunted on the poverty of his country at the table of his host, the occasion being when the large silver candlesticks were lighted. In a burst of misguided patriotism he declared that he had more and better candlesticks in his own castle at home than were ever lighted in a hall in England. A wager was offered and he felt he could not draw back. When his English friends visited the north

to join Montrose's venture for Prince Charles, they demanded the wager to be put to the test. The laird's brother placed behind every seat at the dining-table a gigantic Highlander, holding in his right hand a drawn sword, and in the left a blazing torch made of the bog-pine. Ere the strangers recovered from their surprise, he said, pointing to the torch-bearers, "Behold the chandeliers of my brother's house! not one of these men knows any law but their Chief's command. Would you dare to compare to *them* in value the richest ore that ever was dug out of mines? How say you, cavaliers?—is your wager won or lost?"

With a graphic statement of the alternatives like this we assent that a man is more precious than fine gold. But as a matter of fact in national policy is not our practice exactly the opposite? Do we not count our wealth by trade returns, and imports and exports, and balance-sheets? Do we ever dream that there is another standard of both personal and national wealth in the quality of life produced? In a prospectus of any enterprise do we not judge it by commercial tests alone, heedless of what it means in its effects on human life? We call a country rich, when it can stand the test of any material standard. But in the final judgment these will have no place, and an altogether different test must be applied.

To say this is no foolish contempt of money, and the power it gives to a man or a nation. It is only to state the fact that in the long run, in the case of the individual and the nation alike, a man is more precious than fine gold, even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. We cannot be too often reminded that all life must be judged not by its possessions but by itself. It cannot be too often asserted that the life of a man or a nation consisteth not in the abundance of the things it possesseth. Can a country be truly called rich so long as human life is still so cheap as it is, so long as there are such plague-spots in our cities, so long as amid all the treasures of commerce and art there still exist such crowds of our fellows in squalor and sordidness, dwarfed in body and mind, with no spiritual horizon broader than the beasts that perish? If the end of civilisation is not money but men, then though a nation's ships are in every sea and its commerce in every market, and its soldiers ever pushing back the frontier of empire, if it is not developing a higher and nobler type of citizen, in Bacon's phrase a stouter breed and disposition of the people, its civilisation is a dismal failure. There may be as in the Burden of Babylon a glut of gold and a poverty of men—poverty in all that makes men men.

John Ruskin, with some of the passion and power of a prophet, never wearied of insisting on the distinction we have been enforcing. This distinction between money and men is at the root of all his economic writings. He has been reviled as an obscurantist, as protesting against machinery and railways and the great industrial enterprises of our age. This is the misunderstanding of unthinking and casual readers. The basis of his protest is a protest against the prevailing materialistic creed, as if last century had found redemption, or could find it, through scientific discoveries alone, through engineering triumphs, and electrical appliances. He lived and died protesting that a man is more precious than fine gold. "It may be discovered that the true veins of wealth are purple—and not in Rock, but in Flesh—perhaps even that the final outcome and consummation of all wealth is in the producing as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed, and happy-hearted human creatures. . . . In some far-away and yet undreamt-of hour, I can even imagine that England may cast all thoughts of possessive wealth back to the barbaric nations among whom they first arose; and that, while the sands of the Indus and adamant of Golconda may yet stiffen the housings of the charger, and flash

from the turban of the slave, she, as a Christian mother, may at last attain to the virtues and the treasures of a Heathen one, and be able to lead forth her Sons, saying These are *my* Jewels."

If we are to be saved from the doom of old Babylon, we must have our citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven. We must make Jesus King. We must decide and judge and act according to His mind. We must learn from Him the priceless worth of a single human life. We must see in ourselves, and in others, the image of God, despoiled and defaced, but still enough to show that we were born for the love of God. We must see the sacredness of soul, and in every conflict take the side of soul against sense. We must serve our generation by the will of God. We must bend to the yoke of Christ. We must be rich towards God at all costs, whatever else. We must see the spiritual values of life, and in all decisions choose the better part. We must have our lives inspired by the gracious pity and tender love of our Master. And the word of the prophet can be fulfilled in another sense than in the doom of Babylon, "I will make a man more precious than fine gold, even a man than pure gold of Ophir."

XXIII

SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.—Exodus ii. 12.

In this incident of Moses' career we have the first dawning of a great resolve. As was to be expected, it was imperfect, hesitating. It was the fruit of impulse, rather than of principle, and so it lacked the masterly decision of a plan long thought out. It is a dramatic situation which the story reveals—a boy brought up out of his natural sphere among the ruling race, discovering himself akin to the down-trodden, oppressed slave population. How he made the discovery we do not know, but he was bound sooner or later to make it, if not from friend, then from any jealous, envious enemy. Thoughtful, observant, of noble make of mind and heart, he must have had many troubled hours. He would feel himself belonging completely to neither of the two classes. Drawn by training and education to the dominant Egyptians, drawn by sympathy and blood-

tie to the lower race, he came to feel himself an alien in the palace of the Pharaoh, and had also to learn that he was an alien from his brethren according to the flesh. Imagine an Armenian child brought up in the palace of the Sultan, coming to full consciousness of life at the time of the terrible massacres, and we would get something like an historical parallel to the situation. All that was best in Moses would plead for giving his life somehow in the service of his kinsfolk; but much that could not be called quite ignoble would pull him to the other side.

When at last he made the plunge which settled his future life, it was done undesignedly, and not even from the highest motives. It is a stage in the education of a great soul, and it is instructive to see how in the providence of God a servant of His was led through his very mistake to become worthy for the highest service. For mistake this first interposition of Moses was, only redeemed from sordidness by its generosity. Tossed about for many days on the dilemma we have described, tempted by the thought of a great career somewhere among the Egyptians, drawn by the mysterious bond of blood to the outcast Hebrews, he would be often in a mood to let his destiny be settled by a chance. The

chance came, when one day he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren; and in a moment the die was cast; he took the Hebrew's side, and slew the oppressor. I have said that this act was not done from the highest motives. It could not have been, because for one thing it was not a religious motive. At this time Moses could not be said to be religious except in some external way. It was not till afterwards in the desert that he came to know God, and give up heart and life to Him. It was an act of passion, in spite of its generosity in taking the weaker side. It was the fruit of sentiment rather than principle, more of a youthful escapade with a touch of bravado in it, than anything else. This is not to say that Moses may not have thought the whole situation out, and have felt that he must somehow cast in his lot with his brethren. That is almost certain, but in the occasion chosen he was hurried into decision. Indeed it was not decision at all; for we gather that he did not mean this to be the point of departure for his life.

The act was done with a certain circumspection, and a prudential regard for consequences, which shows that he meant meanwhile to live his old life in Pharaoh's palace, after having displayed his practical

sympathy with the men of his own blood. "He looked this way, and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand." He wanted to make his brethren feel that he felt for them and was in heart one with them, but he had made no definite decision as to how he was going to run his life on these lines; and in taking the step to which his deepest instincts prompted him there was a timidity, a hesitancy, which showed it to be not the result of principle. He was not sure of himself, and was not sure of duty, and not sure of what he meant to do afterwards, and so he wanted to be circumspect and not commit himself too much and too suddenly. He wanted his sympathy to be known to his brethren, but to be hidden from their oppressors. He was not prepared with a policy for his conduct. If he had felt it to be the absolute imperative of duty, he would not have been so cautious about the secrecy of his act.

The deepest motive in his mind was a noble one, to identify himself with his down-trodden people. His heart was moved with pity and compassion, and his great soul chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. But the way of duty was not clear to him,

and he could not shake himself free from the natural considerations of his situation. It could not be clear, heaven-sent duty, so long as he had thoughts of shame or fear, which made him look this way, and that way, and make sure that he was unnoticed before he took his momentous step. How different his demeanour was in after years, when he had completely submitted to God, and knew himself a whole-hearted servant of God! When he bearded Pharaoh and all the wisdom and might of Egypt, there was no more hesitation, and no mixed motives, no looking this way and that way. He had learned what every great heart must learn, and does learn in the presence of imperious duty, that he must follow right whithersoever it lead him.

The sin of this act, apart from the question of the right to slay an oppressor which in any case would be judged from a different standard then than now, lay in the moral cowardice that would not accept the consequences of the act, and most of all in the unworthy motives which destroyed its moral virtue as absolute duty. For the sin he was sorely punished, not merely by incurring the anger of Pharaoh which was only to be expected, but also by the suspicion of his brethren who could not see that he did desire to identify himself with them in their

sorrows. He had to know exile and the desert loneliness, before his motives could be purged, and himself made a perfect instrument for the will of God.

It was natural, however, that Moses should at this time show caution and prudence in the difficult position in which he was placed, and natural that he should be tempted to regulate his conduct according to whether any one could see him when he looked this way and that way, before he struck the decisive blow. But in so far as this natural temptation was yielded to, in so far his act lost its moral virtue. For prudence is not morality. Prudence is often a good quality, and even fear of consequences is quite a legitimate motive of action, a motive indeed to which all our laws appeal to some extent; but in itself prudence is not a moral quality. It was natural that Moses should consider what any chance bystander would think of this act; but in so far as that weighed with him, in so far his act lost character as a moral decision. To act from a motive of fear is to take the virtue out of the act. To refrain from an act for the same motive of fear may be a good thing for the man and for the community, as when a burglar refrains from theft from fear of the policeman, but it is not a moral abstention. It does not

become moral until it corresponds to an inward judgment of right.

When we seriously consider our own mind and conduct, we must be struck by the large place we give in all questions of right and wrong to considerations like those which marred Moses' act. How often we do things, and refrain from things, not because of any principle in ourselves, but merely because of some outside considerations, such as whether when we look this way and that way there should chance to be no man in sight. To many, duty is only what our fellow-men expect of us. We conform to the standard of the community. And when we are freed from the restraints and the sanctions of our fellows, we lose our bearings, and our conduct vacillates from one side to another. Some of you who are strangers will do here in Scotland what you would not dream of doing at home; and Scotsmen will do in France what to them would be impossible in Scotland. Quite apart from the merits of the particular thing, whether it is justifiable or not, the point is that all acts done from such outside considerations have no moral worth. The root of duty is inward, conformity to a standard set up in a man's own soul, conformity to what we call conscience; and apart from that there is no such

thing as pure morality. A thing which is dependent on your looking this way and that way is not absolute duty in an ethical sense.

At the same time, this is not to say that the social conscience of the community to which most of us conform is a thing of naught. It is one of the strongest means by which God educates us morally. We inherit that social conscience reflected in the opinion of our fellow-men. It is like our spiritual climate into which we are born. It represents the slowly-gathered gains of the past, and which we try to formulate in legislation. But the man who thinks he performs the whole duty of man because he conforms his conduct rigidly to the legislation of his country has never grasped the first principles of what moral duty means. Legislation must always lag behind the keenest sense of duty which the developed conscience of individuals feels. It is always a compromise, too high for some, too low for others. So we can never make human law the standard of highest action. Our code of law is not an ideal, but a working scheme, a limit below which we as a community would fain not fall. A man may even be forced to break law in the interests of a higher morality. You would not call a man *good* necessarily because he ruled his conduct so as to

keep out of the clutches of the policeman. There are ethically worse men who have never been in jail than any who have ever been in it. A prison may well be—as the inscription on the old Edinburgh Tolbooth had it—

> Sometimes a place of right
> Sometimes a place of wrong,
> Sometimes a place of jades and thieves,
> And honest men among.

To make our action moral we need a higher standard than any outside one, however pure that may be. If our lives are ruled only by what is expected of us by our own set, by what our society thinks respectable, or even by what our law calls legal, we are really without true guidance, and are at the mercy of circumstances. It is when such external standards are a man's only rule that he can come to think in Kipling's line that there are no ten commandments East of Zuez. If we are always at the mercy of the particular moral climatic conditions in which we happen for the time to be, if we cannot decide and act until we have looked this way and that way to make sure that it is safe or permissible, then we have abrogated the true function of moral life, and are false to our own highest manhood.

Our judgments and decisions must be made inde-

pendently of fluctuating circumstances, if need be in opposition to the opinion and practice of the community. We must be ready to obey God rather than men, to listen to the still small voice of conscience rather than the loud call of the multitude, to respond to the dictates of duty, not to the fear of consequence. Man is not like to horse or mule which have no understanding. He is not asked to obey blindly a rule, but to move willingly to the dictates of the highest in him. When he does, he becomes a fellow-worker with God for his own life as well as for the world at large. God's call to a man, therefore, is ever to give himself up freely to the good, to submit his heart to God, and to regulate his life by obedience to the divine guidance. When Moses did this, and had made the complete surrender, duty no longer appeared dubious, dependent on looking this and that way. It came with a categorical imperative. The law of God was seen to be the law of his own life; God's purpose was seen to be the end of his own being.

Nothing is so remarkable in the life of our Lord as His certitude of tread, the calm assurance with which He walked. There was no hesitancy about His moral judgments. He lived by an inward rule; He walked by a heavenly light; so His steps never

faltered. It was ever the path of duty, simple, direct, and there was no look this way or that way, though the road led on to Calvary. If our hearts are fixed on God, if we give ourselves to follow Jesus, if we abide in Him, He will be our inward light, He will become our very conscience, enlightening it, educating it in the fuller apprehension of duty; His Spirit will take of the things of God and show them unto us; we will be concerned simply to do right, to please God, to follow Jesus. Our whole lives will become Christo-centric, moving unerringly in the line of life. We will not follow even a multitude to do evil. We will not look this way or that way for the approval or dissuasion of men: we will look in the face of Jesus, and judge all things by what we see there, all ambition and desire, all motives, all conduct, all life, all duty. "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; wayfaring men though fools shall not err therein: the redeemed shall walk there."

It is a plain path, after all, that way of life, that leadeth unto God.

XXIV

ASKING AND GETTING

Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you : for every one that asketh, receiveth ; and he that seeketh, findeth ; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.—St. Matthew vii. 7, 8.

If we have even partially understood Christ's teaching in this sermon on the Mount, with its imperatives, with its strong demands, setting forth a righteousness exceeding the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees; if we have felt that Christ has been unfolding the blessed life for us, we must have been struck by the tacit argument for prayer. As part by part of the Master's high design for men was being disclosed, when our ears heard what He expected of us, when the chill fell upon our hearts as we compared His commandment with our achievement, our thought must more than once have been, who is sufficient for these things? When He preached faith, implicit and sweet as that of the birds and the lilies, to us with our doubts and our

cares and our fretful fears; when He preached love as high as the love of heaven to us with our dark envy and malice and anger and self-seeking; what could our answer be but a sigh? When He laid bare the secret motives and selfish designs of hypocrites' hearts, when He solemnly denounced the false righteousness which only lived in an empty parade, when He touched the sins that mix with our most holy things, the desire for display, for reputation, seeking other rewards than a pure conscience and the Father's smile, did not even the best of us stand rebuked before His piercing gaze? When He rescued the law from dead formalism and word-interpretation, when He put a new higher meaning into it as He declared with authority "I say unto you," did He not seem to lift it up out of our reach altogether? Who can think to climb the glittering peaks of the Mount of God to which He points? Who is able to live the life of love, a love which ever gives and gives again, which is tender as the morning dew upon the flowers? Who can so direct his steps that he may keep in the way of life? How can a man attain to what the Master teaches? Christ's answer to this evident difficulty is—Ask, seek, knock. He has forced in on us the acknowledgment of the argu-

ment for prayer. He impresses us with the practical need of it, and then He says Pray.

Neander, whose opinion is always worth considering, thinks this passage about prayer an interpolation. It was, he thinks, said by our Lord on another occasion, and put in here by St. Matthew. He does not see any connection between the passage and the rest of the sermon. Probably Christ did use this argument on another occasion, for He was often giving His disciples lessons about prayer, but it seems to me natural and even necessary that such teaching should be included in this reported sermon. It would not have been complete without it; an important part of the Master's teaching would have been omitted. In another part of this sermon Christ had already given part of His teaching about prayer. He had warned against the vices of Pharisaic religion and of Pagan religion in this matter of prayer. He warned against the ostentation and display, which magnified the form and time and place, and killed the spirit. The reward of prayer is power to pray, a prayerful spirit, a life in secret communion with the Father. He warned also against vain repetition, the folly of thinking to be heard for much speaking. These are external views of prayer due to low and unworthy thoughts

of God. Christian prayer is spiritual, a thing of the soul and the whole attitude of life.

But because He condemned formality and repetition, our Lord must not be mistaken to mean that short, irregular, perfunctory prayer is all that is required; for here He continues His lesson in prayer, a lesson which, among other things, teaches the necessity for earnestness, for full urgent desire. It is even a lesson in perseverance, showing the value of unwearied asking, the power of persistence in seeking. Prayer is a thing of the whole life. The question is not what do you do on occasions, but what are you?—not do you perform certain acts of worship and devotion, but are you worshipful in heart, prayerful in life, reverent in mind? Is communion with you only an act now and again achieved, or a state at all times lived? To come once in a while to bend before the altar in formal fashion is to make the Pharisees' mistake. Christ teaches that the altar should be set up in the soul to become the centre and the source of your life. In the heart must be the praying-ground, stretched out at the feet of God.

Prayer therefore is not formal, though it has its fit forms and occasions which become channels of blessing. It is not bound to these, need not be

confined to set times and seasons. In its essence it should be continuous, without intermission, unaffected by any outward change. It is the bent of the life, the bias of a mind which is ever towards God. Those therefore who stop with Christ's negative teaching, such as His warning against Pharisaic ostentation and heathen repetition, mistake Him. Prayer to Christ was a lifelong thing with never a break or gap in it. It was an instinct and a habit, an instinct which sprang out of the depths of life, and a habit which covered the whole extent of life. This subject of prayer is vital. It cannot be left to chance or to mood, any more than it can be confined to form. Without it the blessed life is a dream. Without it the sermon on the Mount is a mockery. Without it the righteousness of the Kingdom is set for our despair. The rich fair fruit of Christian living is only possible because it has its root in prayer.

The life which our Lord discloses in this sermon is no easy achievement, the result of casual thought and chance effort. It is strenuous life, and can only be maintained strenuously. If it depends on prayer, the prayer must be strenuous. It *does* depend on prayer; for prayer brings God into the life. The language which Christ uses here represents urgency.

It rises in an ascending scale, gathering force as it goes, till it reaches a climax. Prayer must gain in fervour. It must grow. It is urgent: it is persistent: it gets clamorous. Ask: be not content with asking, seek: be not content with seeking, knock. Genius has been called the capacity for taking pains, the power of toiling terribly. Nothing truly and lastingly great has ever been produced without something of that overmastering fervour which counts all toil small for the great end in view. Think you that the great aim of life is of less importance than any work of art which genius produces? To gain the heights you will need perseverance. To build up character you will need the capacity for taking pains. To work in the Kingdom you will need the fervour of soul which loses itself in its work. To keep step with Christ, the lagging feet must be winged. Where is there such need for the genius which toils terribly as here? To live the blessed life one needs and must have genius, the genius for prayer. The pervading spirit must be perfervid—ask! seek! knock!

But perhaps the chief lesson which our Lord taught in this passage is the certainty of answered prayer. The repetition gives emphasis to that. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall

find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." And not content with this reiterated assertion, it is repeated all again in a wider form and stated as a law of universal application—"For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." It is stated as a law, and it is a law. Our Lord never apologised for prayer, never built up a defence for praying; and we do not need to do so. The time has long since passed for that. It is its own apology: it itself is its evidence. We cannot help but pray, whether it avails us or not. The human race is ever on its knees on the altar stairs "that slope through darkness up to God." Life is a bundle of needs. It is begun, continued, and ended somewhere in the graduated scale of asking, seeking, knocking. The object of living seems to be to reveal to us our needs that we may strive to satisfy them. We are creatures of immense desire which forces us to seek fulfilment.

We speak about unanswered prayer, because we take a limited and narrow view both of prayer and of its true answer. There is no unanswered prayer. All men ask in their time, and the result comes with the certainty of law. God's world is no delusion: it is a mighty system of cause and

effect. Strike the cause fairly, and the effect will follow. Christ builds His argument for prayer on this natural basis. The problem of unanswered prayer is due to wrong ideas of prayer or of the answer. Prayer is no magical charm to get what the idle heart or giddy eye desires; or rather what they do really desire is their prayer, and after that fashion and after no other will they be answered. But that an answer of some kind must come is a fact. Your life has a prayer, a solemn, serious prayer. You may never have put it into words; you may not be fully conscious of it. The answer to your prayer is forming itself as the prayer is uttered. That for which you are asking, seeking, knocking — what is it? — that you are getting. What is your prayer?—not necessarily your words, your spoken petitions, your fleeting chance aspirations.

For example, though you come formally asking for humility, if you are giving over your heart to pride and your life to empty vanity, then pride is your prayer and not humility, and the curse of pride, its pitiful loveless portion is your answer. Though you come beseeching for purity, asking to be cleansed from the stain of sin, if your heart is ever turning to its sin, covertly rejoicing in it, if

it is a welcome nest for impure thoughts and foul desires, if your whole life is bending that way, that is your prayer and not the other. The answers come with unerring precision. Not those few and formal words you utter, not those conventional phrases are your prayers, but that for which your eye lusts and your heart hankers. As you are, so are your prayers. The important thing is not that you should ask, for you cannot help asking, but that you should ask aright. That which is a savour of life unto life can be a savour of death unto death.

If we pray out of a sincere heart, if our whole intention is bent in the direction of our words, if there is passion in our praying, really desiring the thing we utter, asking, seeking, knocking for the best gifts, the answer comes with the same certainty. Our Lord is speaking here to those who desire the righteousness of the Kingdom and who long for the blessed life and seek to tread the narrow way. He assures them that they shall have their appropriate reward. He made the same promise when He said, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." We reap as living souls the measure of our sowing. We get along the line of our desire

if it be our real desire. Be not shy of asking; for every one that asketh receiveth. Seek great things from God; for he that seeketh findeth. Let no man shame you from knocking as if there were no way through where you knock; for to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

> **All men's prayers to Thee raised**
> **Return possessed of what they pray Thee.**

As the man of affairs attains capacity to deal with business by giving himself unremittingly to practice; as the scholar becomes learned by giving himself to study; so the saint becomes such by giving himself to prayer. And as we have seen, it is a sphere which is open to all; for it is not a matter of formal times and vain repetition, but a matter of the bent of the life and the attitude of the heart towards God.

Have we any desire in the matter, any longing for the pure heart and the merciful spirit and the meek mind and the saintly thirst after goodness? With all our seeking do we ever seek spiritual communion, and the peace that passeth knowledge? We are only on the surface of life, till we have developed some deeper needs than the world can ever supply. Let us ask for higher things, and

seek some larger things, and knock at untried doors. Let our desire be towards God; let it be our wish that Christ shall so dominate us that we think His thoughts and speak His speech; let the blessed life be our ambition; and we shall ask much and receive everything; we shall seek and find the sweet mysteries of divine love; and shall knock at unopened gates which will usher us into wondrous ways that bring us home to God.

XXV

THE HEROISM OF ENDURANCE

If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and though in a land of peace thou art secure, yet how wilt thou do in the pride of Jordan? —JEREMIAH xii. 5 (R. V.).

WE get many glimpses into the personality of Jeremiah. Though the story of his life is fragmentary, we can read the story of his heart. Again and again we see something which reveals his inner nature. We see a timid, shrinking man in process of hardening to be made the prophet required for his generation. That character, keen and strong like well-tempered steel, was formed in the fire. It was ever through the furnace of living pain. Of all the martyrdoms of the Bible—and it is a long record of martyrdoms—there is none so unrelieved as this one. Christ had keener sorrow, but He also had keener joy. He had a hope which was assurance. He knew that His blood would be the seed of the Church. Whatever the present might have been to Him, He had always the future. "For the joy

that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame." Jeremiah escaped pangs that only the pure heart of Christ could feel, but he was forced by the facts of his age to utter a message that had few notes of hope. He lived on till he was an old man, and saw the calamities he had himself predicted. His eyes, that had wept over the Holy City, saw it sacked and depopulated. He had to witness the fulfilment of his own words of doom. Unless we can enter with some sympathy into the sort of man Jeremiah was by nature, unless we can understand the man, we cannot understand the book. Once and again he wished to give up the task as too heavy a burden for him to bear; but ever he was braced to face his destiny once more with clear eye and stern brow.

In the present instance we see the prophet's education going on. We see him being hardened in the fire like a Damascus blade. In a mood of depression, sick with his failure in the great city, he longs for the quiet village hallowed by the peaceful days of his youth. He turns to home like a tired bird to its nest, as a wounded beast drags himself to his lair—to find in the nest a scorpion! His fellow-townsmen, even his brethren and the house of his father, even they dealt treacherously with him.

He is learning the *loneliness of life at the high altitudes.* The ordinary forms of good and evil easily find comradeship. Men shudder at an exceptional evil, and shrink from an exceptional good. Not every one wants to breathe the foul vapours of the pit; not every one can breathe the rarefied air of the heights. Commonplace good and evil attract crowds according to their kind. Jeremiah had to pay the price of singularity. He had to learn not only to do without the sweet incense of popular favour, but also to stand unflinching even when it turned into the hot breath of hatred. He had to submit not only to be without friends, but to see friends become foes.

This experience through which the prophet passed is a cruel one. It either makes a man, or mars him, and nearly always hardens him. It creates an indignation, a holy anger sometimes against men, sometimes against the strange untoward state of affairs, sometimes against God. It has made some raise blasphemous voice and impious hand. Such an experience is always presented with the temptation, which came to Job, to curse God and die. The injustice of it rankles in the heart, unless the heart is bent humbly and inquiringly to God to learn what the true meaning of the visitation may

be. Jeremiah here is kicking against the pricks which have wounded the feet of men for centuries, how to account for the fact that in a world governed by a righteous God, righteousness should often have to suffer so much. But in the midst of the cruel experience he never lets go his grip of God. "Righteous art Thou, O God," he says—whatever comes, that is the first established fact of life. "Yet," he continues in holy boldness, "let me reason with Thee of Thy judgments. Wherefore doth the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they at peace that deal treacherously?" His indignant soul, on fire for justice, cries out that it ought not to be so. But the undercurrent of the complaint is not the seeming prosperity of the wicked, but his own pain and sorrow and terrible adversity. We do not ask a solution of the universe, till we are forced to ask a solution of our own place and lot in it. God's providence seemed perfect to Job, till he was caught in the tempest and tossed aside broken. We are not much concerned about mere abstract injustice. Jeremiah's *wherefore* about the wicked is really a *why* about himself. Why am I bared to the blast in following Thy will and performing Thy command? Why are tears and strife my portion? Why am I wearied out and left desolate, though I am fighting

the Lord's battle? That is the prophet's real complaint.

Notice the answer, surely the strangest and most inconsequent ever given. There is no attempt at explanation. God never explains Himself in a ready-made fashion. God explains Himself through life. God explains Himself by deeds. The complaint here is answered by a counter-complaint. Jeremiah's charge against God of injustice is met by God's charge against Jeremiah of weakness. If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? If in the land of peace thou art secure, how wilt thou do (O faint-hearted one!) in the pride of Jordan? The "Pride of Jordan" means the dangerous ground by the river, where the heat is almost tropical and the vegetation is rank. It is jungle, tangled bush where wild beasts lurk, leopards and wolves and (at that time also) lions. The answer to the complaint against the hardness of his lot is simply the assertion that it shall be harder still. He has only been running with footmen so far—he will have to contend with horses, when he may have cause to speak of weariness. He has only been living in a land of peace so far—he will have to dwell in the jungle where are wild beasts, and then he may talk of danger.

Does it seem an unfeeling answer? It was the answere Jeremiah needed. He needed to be braced, not pampered. He is taught the need of endurance. It is a strange cure for cowardice, a strange remedy for weakness; yet it is effective. It gives stiffening to the soul. The tear-stained face is lifted up calm once more. A new resolution creeps into the eye to prove worthy of the new responsibility. God appeals to the strength in Jeremiah, not to the weakness. By God's grace I will fight, and fighting fall if need be. By God's grace I will contend even with horses; and I will go to the pride of Jordan though the jungle growl and snarl. This was the result on Jeremiah, and it was the result required. Only a heroic soul could do the heroic work needed by Israel and by God, and it was the greatest heroism of all which was needed, the *heroism of endurance.*

Nothing worth doing can be done in this world without something of that iron resolution. It is the spirit which never knows defeat, which cannot be worn out, which has taken its stand and refuses to move. This is the "patience" about which the Bible is full, not the sickly counterfeit which so often passes for patience, but the power to bear, to suffer, to sacrifice, to endure all things, to die, harder still sometimes to continue to live. The whole world

teaches that patience. Life in her struggle with nature is lavish of her resources. She is willing to sacrifice anything for the bare maintenance of existence meanwhile. Inch by inch each advance has to be gained, fought for, paid for, kept. It is the lesson of all history also, both for the individual and for a body of men who have espoused any cause.

Christ's Church has survived through her power to endure. She was willing to give up anything to hold her ground, willing to pour out blood like water in order to take root. The mustard seed, planted with tears and watered with blood, stood the hazard of every storm, gripped tenaciously the soil, twining its roots round the rocks, reared its head ever a little higher, and spread out its branches ever a little fuller, and when the tempest came held on for very life; and then, never hasting, never resting, went on in the divine task of growing; and at last became the greatest of trees, giving shelter to the birds of the air in its wide-spreading branches. So is the kingdom of heaven. It is a true parable of the Church. She conquered violence, not by violence, but by virtue. She overcame force, not by force, but by patience. Her sons were ready to die—to die daily—to run with footmen, and then to contend with horses. It was given unto them not only to believe in Christ,

but to suffer for His sake. They could not be stamped out. When their persecutors thought they were scattered like chaff, it turned out that they were scattered like seed. The omnipotent power of Rome was impotent before such resolution. The battle is the place to make soldiers, not the barracks. The Church met the Empire, and broke it through the sheer power to endure. She was willing to suffer, and to suffer, and to suffer—and afterwards to conquer.

It is the same secret of success for the individual spiritual life. "In your patience ye shall win your souls." This method is utterly opposed to the world's method of insuring success, which is by self-assertion, aggressive action, force for force, blow for blow. Patience, not violence, is the Christian's safety. Even if all else be lost, it saves the soul, the true life. It gives fibre to the character. It purifies the heart, as gold in the furnace. "Violence does even justice unjustly," says Carlyle—which was a great admission for him, who worshipped might of any kind even when displayed in violence. The Church wearied out the Empire, and then absorbed it. And it was only when she forgot her Master's method and adopted the world's method, wielding the secular sword, that she grew weak. This is Christ's plan of

campaign, for the Church and for the individual. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved."

What do we know of this heroic endurance? In our fight with temptation, in our warfare against all forms of evil, have we used our Master's watchword, and practised our Master's scheme? Think of our temptation in the matter of Foreign Missions, for example. It is often looked on as a burden, something we must do because it has come to be expected as a sort of duty. It is not a fire in our bones which will give us no peace. It is not a task to which we feel we have been sent. We do not realise that Christ's soul is straitened till it be accomplished. We are easily made faint-hearted about it. We say that results are disproportionate to the effort; or rather (for that is not true) we are overpowered by the vastness of the work. If we find our small attempt a burden, how can we face the vaster problem of making the kingdoms of this world the kingdom of God and His Christ? If we are wearied in our race with footmen, how can we contend with horses?

We are so easily dispirited, not only in Christian enterprise, but also in personal Christian endeavour. We are so soon tempted to give up. The enemy is too hard to dislodge; a besetting sin in our lives is too stubborn; a rampant evil in our community

is too deeply rooted; the beautiful kingdom of heaven of our dreams is an impossible task. Faint-hearted cravens that we are, what are we here in this world for? To find a land of peace in which to be secure? To look for a soft place? To find an easy task? To match ourselves against some halting footmen? We need some iron in our blood. We need to be braced to the conflict again. We need the noble scorn of consequence. What have we done, the best of us, for God or for man? What have we endured for the dream's sake? What have we given up in our self-indulgent life? What sacrifice have we ever made? The folly of holding out for a little, and at last giving up, and letting the truth slip from our fingers! The folly of beginning in the spirit, and at last ending miserably in the flesh! "Ye have not resisted unto blood, fighting against sin."

Is there to be no end to the warfare and the weariness? Is there to be no end in the individual struggle, and in the social endeavour? Must Jeremiah harden himself for ever and stiffen himself ever to endure? Must we resist for ever the sins of our own hearts? Must we protest for ever against the evil of the world? *For ever,* if need be! To begin to serve God is to serve Him for ever. It

knows no cessation. Complainings die in His presence, and we are sent out again, Christ's belted knights—His for ever.

If God send a man to contend with horses, it is well. If God send a man to the pride of Jordan, it is well. He will not go alone. A land of peace without God is a terror. The jungle of Jordan with God is peace. Never a soul is tempted above what it can bear. Never a life is defeated that arms itself with the whole armour of God.

Lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet. "My grace is sufficient for you."

XXVI

THE CHARM OF GOODNESS

He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.—PROVERBS xxii. 11.

IN a book of proverbial philosophy, which takes aspects of religion and life and crystallises them into aphorisms, it is natural to expect many proverbs about goodness and the good man. The Book abounds with succinct ways of saying that only the good life is worth living, and that to sow iniquity is to reap vanity. It puts into homely language the instinctive thought of the human heart that righteousness can never be as wickedness in the estimation either of God or man. Many of these sayings are the fruit of the first natural presupposition that success ought to be the reward of the good and only of the good. It is only just and reasonable in a world governed by a just and reasonable God to expect this. The world should be built on lines which make this not only possible but inevitable; and of course if we are quite sure of our terms as

to what is really success and what is really goodness, this instinctive reasoning would be proven correct. Prophets and saints, however, had to learn not to judge by the eye, and not to jump to the conclusion that every success they saw in life was an evidence of God's favour and every adversity a sign of sin. But even on the surface of life there is sufficient ground to accept the first fresh assumption that it is well to be good and wise to do good. It is not the last word on the subject, but it is a true word so far as it goes. There is much worldly wisdom in the Book of Proverbs; and even worldly wisdom admits and declares (with becoming limitations) that honesty is the best policy, and that inconsiderate selfishness alienates other men. Even if there were nothing else than worldly wisdom in the Book, there is enough to justify it in saying this among other happy things about goodness, "He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend."

The form of the sentence owes its origin to a more primitive state of society than ours, when an ideal king in a city like Jerusalem was looked on as a shepherd of his people, and when he could be supposed to know all about each of them. The general report about a man's life and character could reach

him; and if he were a wise and good king he would be glad to learn of a subject living a noble, good life, for he would know that such men were the strength of his kingdom, and he would want to make them his friends to whom he could go for counsel, sure that no thought of self-seeking could mar it. It is a pretty picture of primitive times when kings were not in such great disproportion to the number of the population; and we see why the prophets laid so much stress on kings being worthy men, since so much depended on them in moulding the sentiment and life of the whole community. If the king who is the fountain of honour, on hearing of the helpful, useful acts of one of the humblest of his subjects, summoned him to court and begged the favour of his friendship; that would be surely a proof positive that it was worth while being good. To feel that the king's eyes were upon you, and that they only looked with pleasure on honest and true men, would be an incentive to sincere living. But though kings are no longer on such intimate terms with ordinary beings, the thought of the proverb is plain, that in a properly constituted state of society goodness should always meet with its deserts; and that indeed, even as things are, this is so, though in a very limited and modified degree.

Now this is certainly one side of the truth. We are inclined in all our religious thinking to consider almost exclusively the other and darker side, of the enmity of the world to God, and the tribulation which His saints so often experience at the hand of men, and the loneliness of life at its great heights, when a man is separated from his fellows and made to feel his own singularity, if not also their hatred. We only need to know a page or two of the religious history of the race to know how true all this is; and if a man would be good he must be willing to do without the applause of men and be willing to stand alone with God. That side is true and has often been insisted on from this pulpit. But you cannot put the religious life into a formula and confine it by set lines. It is well, therefore, to consider also the fact which underlies this and other parts of Scripture, which take for granted that the world was made for men to know and love and serve God in, and which look for suitable surroundings in which to exercise these functions harmoniously.

To begin with, God never leaves Himself without witnesses, and there are always even in the worst of times men who have not bowed the knee to Baal, and who are in sympathy with all that is good and who rejoice in all who are good. Also, in the hearts

of all men there are instincts and capacities that make for good; so that in all our folly and sinning God is not far from any one of us. We were made for the love of God, and even when we reject our true destiny, heart and conscience will not be completely dulled; and a man of pure heart and gracious lips is usually recognised as living as we all ought to live. In our best moments we would like to have him as a friend. We like a man whom we can trust; and unless our nature is utterly depraved we prefer such a man to have a place of power. It is said of one of the Roman Emperors, when Christianity was in the ascendency but had not completely uprooted paganism, that on his succession to the throne he threatened to dismiss all his ministers and servants who would not deny their Christian faith. We can imagine what a temptation this would be to courtiers to whom court favour was the breath of their nostrils. Only a few were faithful to their religion, and preferred to leave the sunshine of the court rather than deny their Lord. The story goes that from these few the king chose his chief ministers and reposed on them unbounded trust. Even from the point of view of worldly wisdom, we would say that the king showed insight apart altogether from his own opinions about religion. The

weak-kneed sycophants were on any standard contemptible. Real goodness is attractive to men unless they have quite killed their better nature. There is something winning about a sincere, sweet soul, transparent and unselfish. He has a grace of lip and of life that lays hold of us. There is a beauty in holiness, which we must see and acknowledge unless we are spiritually as blind as bats. Something speaks to us for the good man. An upright, genuine character is winsome, and our hearts admit the charm.

Of course there is a goodness which is not attractive, a formal, stiff, and sometimes a self-righteous uprightness which repels, a professed pureness of heart which has no grace of lip. Righteousness may take a sour and ugly form which irritates and repels. A man may make a martyr of himself for righteousness' sake, and never draw a tear from a single eye. A man may stand as an unwearied witness for truth, and never a heart thrill in sympathetic response. Religion might many a time ask to be saved from its friends. There is so often some warp in the grain which spoils the whole piece, some angularity of character which destroys the influence of what is really good; and religion has to bear the discredit. It is well for us who take the name of Christ to ask ourselves if we are by

walk and conversation *commending* our Master, making His life attractive, or are by our acrid temper or our loveless life putting stumbling-blocks in the way and keeping Him from drawing men to Himself. If we are misunderstood and persecuted for our faith it is well, first of all before we condemn any, to make sure that it is really for righteousness' sake, and not through some fault in ourselves, some failure to present Christ in His beauty, some flaw of mind, some twist of nature, which induces aversion. For goodness *is* attractive, whether we who take it upon ourselves to represent goodness are or not. Even the most hardened sinner will sometimes be touched by innocence. A little child can lead us all. The pure in heart not only see God for themselves, but also convince the world of God.

It is true that sometimes righteousness has to appear militant. It has to fight against principalities of evil. It has to draw the sword and to divide the world into armed camps. It has to stand up against other men, and denounce evil, and to appear hard. Sometimes it has its back against the wall fighting for life; but even then admiration is called forth in the breast of every brave man. We love a man, a true, clean-blooded, sincere man. Besides, goodness is not always seen in revolt, in mili-

tant guise. It oftener has scope for the gentler virtues, patience, charity, kindness. And every one who has eyes to see is attracted by it most in its softer moods. Its gentleness makes it great. The man of pure heart and gracious lips may have enemies, but he does not lack for friends. We speak of the hatred our Lord experienced on earth, but He also tasted of human love. Men were drawn to Him, left all to follow Him, lived for Him in spite of all their weakness, and died for Him. He grappled men's hearts to Him with hoops of steel. Sinners living in wilful rebellion to the religion of the time poured out their devoted love on Him. The beauty and nobility and tenderness of His life touched crowds into new hope and new faith. His disciples who had something of His method and His mind had also something of His success. The grace of their lips brought them friends and adherents. St. Paul in prison was followed by the prayers and love of devoted hearts. The Gospel made its way against the might of Rome through the attractive power of goodness, through the appreciation of the beauty of holiness. Not by might nor by power but by the weakness of love were the great things of the world brought to nought.

Is it not one of the lessons of life, if only we were

wise enough to comprehend it, that injustice, evil, selfishness, is a *mistake?* Besides the guilt of sin, which blackens a man's heart, there is also the folly of sin. Besides being a stain, it is also a source of weakness. It not only separates a man from God, but also separates him from his fellow-men. In the long run we find out the man of guile, the crooked shifty character, on whom no reliance can be placed. In the long run we detest the evil speaker and backbiter, however clever his cynical judgments at first appear. The cruel and proud and contemptuous man can be no real favourite of men. We believe with Bacon that without good-nature man is but a better kind of vermin. Unless our moral taste is vitiated we feel the winsome charm of goodness, the sweet beauty of a Christian character. We give our judgment and affection to the man who loves pureness of heart; and for the grace of his lips we would fain be his friend. We appreciate the man of fine grain, who lives in a world of peace and purity and noble thought. In some we have seen and loved the beauty of goodness and the attraction of gracious lips.

It is *unconsciously* that the good man wins favour. He does not make human favour his end, or he would cease to be good. The moment self-

consciousness comes in, the picture is spoiled. Trickery, smug conceit, and the hateful arts of management creep in. The standard is at once lowered when men become eye-servants, and men-pleasers. But the empire over hearts is given to the humble sincere soul; not to ambition and selfishness but to love and sacrifice, to the pure heart and gracious lips. The blessing of goodness, therefore, is not confined to the man himself. Others participate in it. Its influence is cumulative. It blesses his neighbours and friends, his children and his children's children. It is also a social good, a store of wealth for the whole community. It is of national importance. A man cannot better serve his country than by being a good man. Even the king, if he could only know of it, would rejoice; for every good man is a strength to the body politic, as every evil man is a weakness. If the king is not his friend, he is the king's true friend.

This argument of our text is thus a legitimate one, but it is not the final argument. All this would only be at the best an argument of prudence. In ordinary circumstances and as a general rule we might hold that honesty is the best policy; still that does not take us very far. Goodness needs a higher sanction than prudence. It needs to be made religious.

Prudence might be an argument for grace of lips but not for pureness of heart. It would at the best result in outward propriety, and in formal goodness. It would be righteousness, not holiness, and it is holiness that God asks, an inward relationship not mere outward correctness of conduct. Then again, supposing tribulation comes, supposing wickedness prospers and righteousness is oppressed, supposing men were not friends of the good man but enemies, the feet would be cut from the position if it had not deeper foundation. Supposing the king is not good, supposing it is not David on the throne but Manasseh, not a Marcus Aurelius but a Nero, supposing he surrounds himself with evil counsellors, supposing the state of society makes against religion, and the men in authority hate goodness and therefore would like to justify themselves by frowning on all who have a higher standard than themselves, what then? We can see that the argument of this proverb is not infallible.

But the Bible takes higher ground than prudence. Even in the Proverbs the foundations of goodness are built deeper than the favour of man. It is judged according to how God looks on it. "A good man obtaineth favour of the Lord." That is its true justification, and its true reward. Even if righteous-

ness is met with persecution, even if all men are against it, even if the king does not reward it, even then it is the true wisdom. It is a great loss when the social conditions do not lend the weight of their influence on the side of good. Just laws, right ways of thinking in the community, the smile of authority, are all possible allies for God, and can be used to strengthen religion. But there is a higher standard, unaffected by change. A man might be helped to large endeavour and gracious life by the thought that his king's eye was on him. Let him be so inspired, for it is so. The sense of responsibility which the king's favour ought to bring should be ours. In George Herbert's noble line we can lift up our head with the dignity of a great charge imposed on us—

> Think the king sees thee still; for *his* King does.

"Who is he that will harm you," asks St. Peter, "if ye be followers of that which is good?" To put ourselves on the side of God is to have God on our side. He that loveth pureness of heart for the grace of his lips the King, the King of kings, shall be his friend, and never again can we be friendless; never again can we be alone, though all the world forsake us; for the Father is with us. To be in harmony with

God brings you into harmony with all creation. To be reconciled to God is to be open to all other reconciliations. To have peace with God is to become a peace-maker among men. And who can harm you under the shadow of the Eternal wing? "Thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee."

XXVII

THE THINGS THAT ALONE COUNT

And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.—St. Luke xix. 42.

The Saviour's tears were a startling contrast to the scene of rejoicing to which this incident is appended. It was in the midst of the Triumphal Entry when all were exulting and shouts of hallelujah thrilled the air. The simple pious hearts of the disciples were glad at this evident acceptance of their Master, and they anticipated a speedy capture of Jerusalem itself for Christ when His cause would lay hold of the whole nation and great and glorious events would ensue. They hardly knew what exactly they expected, but in any case it was to be a mighty triumph for Christ, and salvation for Israel. But as the joyful procession swept round the shoulder of the hill, and the fair city gleamed into sight, a hush came over the exulting throng; for the Lord was weeping. *He* had no bright and futile illusions.

A wave of excitement like that which had transported the disciples could not blind Him to the actual facts of the case. He knew that He had lived, and would die, in vain, so far as that hard and proud capital was concerned. He knew that He was rejected of rulers and people; and that ears and hearts were deaf to His message. As He looked at the beautiful city it was not with pride but with anguish. What a history of divine grace was represented there within these walls, the long story of God's love and patience—and its failure! Every tender and gracious page of that story stood out as a witness against the folly and ingratitude and sin of man. There were hearts there as hard as the stones of their walls. The divine love brooded over them with patient pity. They were blind, as their fathers had been blind, to all the mercy and loving-kindness of God, regardless of their day of gracious visitation. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou which killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."

The Redeemer knew that His way in that city was the way of the cross. He knew that city and nation were doomed. They had had their day of

visitation, and were still having it—but the sands were fast running out. In compassionate grief He yearned over them still, weeping for their blindness and hardness of heart. What a pathetic scene is here recalled to our imagination! The gay and careless city smiling in the sunlight, with eager crowds of busy men, full of their interests and pleasures, full of their great religious celebration about to be kept—and the Saviour looking down on it all, weeping. They were throwing away their last chance, following false lights, and dreaming false hopes, seeking false sources of peace, stopping their ears against the voice of wisdom and of love. "If thou hadst known in this thy day the things that belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

It was, as we clearly see now, the day of their visitation, a day of grace, when they might have laid deep the true foundations of a strong national life, and when they might have made their own lives rich with spiritual contents. Jesus had been teaching the way of life, the way of God for man. He had pointed them to the inward source of all strength and joy and peace both for the nation and for individuals. He showed them that the one weakness of a nation is sin, and the one bondage of a

man is sin. They refused to listen to the things that really belonged to their peace, and looked for it in their own schemes. Their political ideals never went farther than what ministered to national vanity and empty pride of race. Factional strife and partisan feeling, with petty plans all bounded by revolt against the yoke of Rome. Their religious ideals were similar, all external in aim, looking for the establishment of a Kingdom of God in the form of a Jewish world-empire. Christ's word could not even be understood by them when He said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you." They rejected His teaching and rejected Himself, and did not know that they were refusing their one and only hope. He came to His own, to fulfil their true history and destiny, to fulfil the aspirations of prophets and saints of their race, but His own received Him not. He was the Life and the Light of men, but they were blind to the light, preferred the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. It was judicial blindness, the result of a long course of moral perversity. They made choice of the lower, when the higher was within their reach, and were without insight to distinguish and recognise the day of visitation. Our Lord's lament was the same as the prophet's lament to their fathers, with the same

passion and pity, "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments, then had thy peace been as a river and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." If they had only known that their day of grace was passing, passing, had almost passed. If thou hadst known in this thy day the things that belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.

If we knew! We too have a day of grace, a day of sweet and hopeful visitation. There are things that belong to our peace, and they are the same things as ever. There can be in us the same judicial blindness, the same moral perversity that hid them from the eyes of the Jews of old. Can the divine love look down on us with anything else than tears, as we pour out the treasures of our hearts on things that profit nothing, as we blunderingly and yet wilfully pursue our foolish courses?

How we mistake the things that really belong to our peace, the things that alone count! What of all the things we do and seek can be put in this class as the essentially important things that affect our real welfare? There is eagerness in the city to-day as in Jerusalem, keenly followed pursuits, plans, and purposes actively and relentlessly engaged in, business, ambition, pleasure, knowledge.

There is plenty of strenuous life in our midst, and men are everywhere in ceaseless quest of the things they imagine count most, the things that belong to their peace and joy. Everybody is after something, spending strength and labour and desire to attain their end. We can guess at the aims and ambitions of many if we are observant; if we are honest we can know what our own pursuits are, the things we really desire and follow after, the things we think count the most, the things we imagine belong to our peace and happiness. What of all these purposes can be dignified by the title of our text as belonging to real peace? What of them viewed from the standpoint of eternity are as strength spent for naught, and labour for that which profiteth nothing?

Some of the pursuits that would be included in such a catalogue are confessedly evil. Even those who follow them most eagerly would not attempt to defend them as the highest, and if they stopped to think they would own that such things cannot ultimately belong to peace. There are sinful pleasures, sinful selfishness, evil ambitions that all would label as certain to end in misery. But what of the many innocent pursuits that have nothing gross or debasing in themselves? The question to be asked of them is not, are they merely innocent but are they

sufficient? Many of the common aims that motive life amongst us are not in themselves evil. Success is good, labour is good, a happy home is good, knowledge is good, delight in friendship is good, artistic capacity is good, business energy is good. But are any or all of these things sufficient, are they enough in life and in death, do they belong to our eternal peace? It must surely be confessed that most of the things most sedulously pursued do not matter essentially. Go over them in detail. Take any common ambition you like—your own or another man's—and judge it from this standpoint, the haste to be rich, the desire to make a name or found a family, or the common aim to have a pleasant time. I need not take them one by one to show the hollowness of each and the failure of each as an adequate and sufficient end for a human soul. All such external things are outside the real issues of life. The world can give them, and the world can take them away. They do not belong to our peace: they do not belong to our *selves.* They are not the things that really matter.

We can see this clearly and convincingly if we ask what they will mean for us at the last. The ultimate, the inevitable test of life is death. We may shut our eyes to it: we may act as though it

were not and could never be. But that after all is the one certainty, and no plan of life can be more than a makeshift which does not take it into account. "What will ye do in the end thereof?" asks the prophet, and surely it is a pertinent and a reasonable question. Things that have no place and no value when viewed in the light of eternity cannot be among those things that belong to our peace. If we have no life of the soul, no reach into the unseen, no citizenship in heaven, no intercourse with the spiritual world, no sympathy even with things eternal: then, in spite of all our getting and striving and learning, we shall be at the last poor and naked and blind and miserable, though we know it not now. These are the things that alone count, the things that belong to our peace. If all our purposes and pursuits must perforce stop on this side of the river, if they are stripped from us and leave us naked before death and the judgment, it is judicial blindness in us as tragic as the Jews' to follow such things with eagerness and neglect the things that belong to our peace. Could not the Saviour weep over us as He wept over them?

If we had known! What vain regrets many a man has at the end of life that he should have been blind to the things that alone count. Many a man

has wished he might live over again that he might undo the past and let the important things have their due proportion in his life. Sometimes the remorse has been despair, not merely the cry of ignorance which says If only I had known! but the cry of anguish for opportunities that have been wilfully lost, for a blindness that has been moral perversity.

> When vain desire at last and vain regret
> Go hand in hand to death and all is vain,
> What shall assuage the unforgotten pain
> And teach the unforgetful to forget?

If we had known! But we do know: we should know: we can know. Our hearts tell us that the things that belong to our peace are not the things we are striving for and sinning for. We may be suffering from the judicial blindness which hides the better part from our eyes. We too may be despising or neglecting the time of our visitation; but the sands have not yet all run out. Be sure it is a time of visitation, a day of grace, the day of the Lord. And He summons us to a new life with other ambitions and desires and hopes. If we go with Him, if we live with Him, if we make our home in the things of the spirit, we will not be at the last tortured with vain desires and vain regrets.

If we had known! But do we not know? The things that really count now are the things that will count at the last. The things that belong to our true peace now are the things that will belong to our peace then. Make a forecast of how you would like to die, with what gains of character and what growth in grace, and what familiarity with the unseen and eternal, what peace of a good conscience, rich with the spoils of life, rich in faith and love and hope. Are the things that will belong to your peace the very things which to-day you are neglecting? If these things are done in the green tree, what will be done in the dry? If you forecast honestly the vain desires at the last, you can forestall the vain regrets. The things that alone count are the things that belong to thine eternal peace. Amid the tinsel and the glitter, amid the specious show of the trivial, amid the maze of side-issues and the false pretensions of the countless things that are of no account, amid the allurement of brief passion, remember the things that belong to thy peace. O my soul, remember!

THE END

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